South Haven Tribune

$3

September 14, 2025

Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

Chris Gerlach has stepped into the role of athletic director for South Haven Public Schools, following the departure of Brock Thumm.

Planting roots and growing athletics

Gerlach shares his goals as SH athletic director

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — Chris Gerlach is settling into his new position as athletic director for South Haven Public Schools.

Gerlach, who accepted the position following Brock Thumm's departure, has worked as the athletic director at Quincy High School for three years and coached three different sports in East Grand Rapids.

Gerlach recently sat down with South Haven Tribune Editor Julie Newell to discuss his life and goals as the new athletic director.

Where are you originally from?

I grew up in Stevensville, Mich., so it's kind of like coming back home a little bit for me.

Graduated from Lakeshore in 2011. After high school, joined the Marine Corps so, I was in the Marine Corps for four years, got out, and moved to Grand Rapids. So, where I'm from I'm kind of from all over a little bit.

Where did you go to college?

I went to Grand Valley (State University) for four years. I coached at East Grand Rapids for a few years. So, I was the seventh-grade head football coach, the sixth through eighth, girls and boys middle school track coach. I was the varsity bowling coach for boys and girls at East Grand Rapids, as well.

I was also a district floating substitute teacher, that was like my full-time job. Then I was an event manager for athletics, but I worked in the athletic department, so I helped the athletic director with all the scheduling and stuff like that. I always forget a couple here, because I had several roles while I was at East. I was the youth field director for rocket football for East Grand Rapids, too. Then went from East Grand Rapids to Quincy, where I was the athletic director for three years and dean of students, too.

What did you study at Grand Valley?

Sport management. I always forget I've got my master's too. So, I studied sports management and business at Grand Valley. While I was at East Grand Rapids, and then a little bit while I was the AD at Quincy, I got my master's in athletic administration from Ohio University.

Why did you choose to study sports management?

I knew I wanted to get into sports somehow. So, I actually started at GV, I thought maybe athletic training because I knew I wanted to get into sports somehow, that just seemed like a good option. I started the prerequisites for that, and the prerequisites for that at Grand Valley are a lot of like the medical prerequisites. I started getting into the science classes and figured out really quickly that science is probably my worst subject. I consider myself a pretty smart guy, but science was just, I was struggling.

I took a semester off because I had heard that Grand Valley was changing. They had a sports leadership bachelor's program that they were turning into a sports management program and I

See GERLACH, page A2

SH Twp. approves fire millage rate increase

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Township board has approved a fire millage rate increase of 3.63 mills.

The board held a public hearing Wednesday, where residents asked for clarification on what exactly the millage covers.

Board member Phillip Poole said the millage will cover the needs of South Haven Area Emergency Services, including an additional four career firefighter paramedics and the cost of fire hydrants in the township.

The millage equates to $622,570 and will be set for a year.

Apartment project

The board approved an amendment to an ordinance for the Lighthouse Bridge Pilot project.

The project is for a 52-unit apartment complex, scheduled to be built on 73rd Street.

The project is funded by Michigan State Housing Development Authority. However, when the plans were sent to them they asked for a section to be removed before they can move forward with the projects.

The section identified for removal in the ordinance was for a service charge in lieu of taxes for dwelling units for low-income persons and families.

Other items

The board also approved a resolution to create a new position of an ordinance enforcement officer.

Township Clerk Brenda Bertorelli said this resolution stemmed from people ignoring a letter the board sent them about the short-term rental ordinance.

She said the township attorney recommended creating this new position instead of having the police or the board handle the situation.

The board held a public hearing for Wayne Pecina's request to revert his property from the city back to the township. No comments were made during the public hearing and the board approved the request.

The property was part of the agreement between the city and township to promote the revitalization of the M-140 corridor to the Blue Star Highway.

Pecina began construction of two storage buildings in December of 2021. Construction of one storage building was finished in 2022, under township inspection.

Due to the agreement between the township and city, Pecina was unable to continue the construction of the second storage building.

The request to revert the property's location required approval from the township and city. The South Haven City Council approved Pecina's request during a May 5 meeting.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

South Haven school board considers strategic plan

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven school board received a presentation from Fielding International about the district's strategic plan this week.

The strategic plan is a requirement that outlines the long-term goals for the district.

Board member Doug Ransom said their strategic plan is overdue for an update. The board is considering hiring Fielding International to help update the plan.

During the presentation, Senior Learning Designer Sara Melton explained the process the firm takes when building or updating a district's strategic plan and showed examples from other schools.

There was no cost mentioned for their services, but school board members said it will be discussed in a future meeting.

No decisions were made during Wednesday's meeting.

Other items

Board member Grassflower was appointed the district's delegate for the 2025 Michigan Association of School Boards assembly on Oct. 23.

The board approved two vendors for the 2025-26 school year, including Cedar Crest Dairy for the milk bids and Alpha Baking for the bread bids.

The board approved the 2025-26 S.H.A.C. handbook.

The board approved the hiring of two new teachers – Angela Burd as a special education teacher at Lincoln Elementary School and John Avery as a science teacher at Baseline Middle School.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

Michigan judge tosses out criminal charges against 2020 Trump false electors

By CRAIG MAUGER and BETH LEBLANC
The Detroit News (TNS)

Joey Cappelletti / AP file

Ingham County District Court Judge Kristen Simmons oversees a preliminary examination in Lansing, on Dec. 13, 2023, for six of the 15 Michigan Republicans who face forgery and other charges for serving as false electors for then-President Donald Trump in 2020.

LANSING — An Ingham County judge threw out on Tuesday criminal charges against 15 Michigan Republicans who signed a certificate falsely claiming President Donald Trump won the 2020 election, ruling that state prosecutors had failed to show an intent to commit fraud.

The decision from Judge Kristen Simmons, an appointee of Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, tossed aside Michigan prosecutors' most direct attempt to bring accountability for the bid to reverse the state's 2020 result.

Simmons in Ingham County's 54A District Court said she believes the Republicans were exercising their constitutional rights by seeking a redress of grievances about the election, which Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden.

"This is a fraud case, and we have to prove intent and I do not believe there is evidence sufficient to prove intent," Simmons said, in front of a crowded courtroom of defendants, their lawyers and the media.

Over the last two years, Simmons has held three sets of preliminary examinations for the Republican electors who were facing felony forgery and uttering and publishing charges.

Simmons had the responsibility to decide whether Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel's office presented enough evidence to prove there's probable cause to believe crimes occurred.

See TOSSED, page A2

Trump blames the 'radical left' for killing of Charlie Kirk

By CARSON SWICK
The Baltimore Sun (TNS)

Even as the person who shot and killed conservative activist Charlie Kirk in Utah Wednesday remained at-large, President Donald Trump appeared to be assigning some blame for the murder.

"For years, those on the radical left have compared wonderful Americans like Charlie to Nazis and the world's worst mass murderers and criminals," Trump said in a recorded video from the White House Wednesday night. "This kind of rhetoric is directly responsible for the terrorism that we're seeing in our country today, and it must stop right now. My administration will find each and every one of those who contributed to this atrocity, and to other political violence – including the organizations that fund it and support it."

The president, who earlier mourned the loss of "The Great, and even Legendary" Kirk, ordered flags to be lowered to half-staff until Sunday evening in his honor.

The founder and CEO of Turning Point USA, Kirk, 31, was shot while speaking to students at Utah Valley University. School officials said the shooter fired the single fatal shot from a building about 200 yards away. His death was met with shock and condemnation across the political spectrum, including from all of America's former presidents Wednesday night on social media.

"There is no place in our country for this kind of violence. It must end now. Jill and I are praying for Charlie Kirk's family and loved ones," wrote Former President Joe Biden.

Former President Barack Obama called Kirk's killing an act of "despicable violence."

"We don't yet know what motivated the person who shot and killed Charlie Kirk, but this kind of despicable violence has no place in our democracy," Obama said. "Michelle and I will be praying for Charlie's family tonight, especially his wife Erika and their two young children."

Former President George W. Bush said Kirk was "murdered in cold blood… on a college campus, where the open exchange of opposing ideas should be sacrosanct."

"Violence and vitriol must be purged from the public square. Members of other political parties are not our enemies; they are our fellow citizens," Bush wrote. "May God bless Charlie Kirk and his family, and may God guide America toward civility."

OBITUARIES

Larry Smith

June 12, 1947 – Sept. 4, 2025

Larry Leon Smith died on Sept. 4, 2025 at his home in South Haven, Mich., with his family by his side.

Larry was born on June 12, 1947, in South Haven. He graduated from LC Mohr High School in 1965.

He started working for Niffs in high school until he was drafted to the US Army in 1966 and discharged in 1972. He worked at the Palisades Power Plant in the Mechanical Maintenance Department for 38 years until his retirement.

He married his first wife, Patricia, who passed away in January 1988 and later met and married Wanda (Kopinski) Smith on June 2, 1990.

Larry was a member of the South Haven American Legion, as well as the V.F.W., Moose, and Elks Lodge.

Larry enjoyed spending quality time with his family and friends, his many vehicles from his TransAm to his trucks, along with golfing, watching football and other sports. Larry will be dearly missed.

Larry is survived by his wife, Wanda, his stepson Reese (Angela) Schoenwether and granddaughter Taylor, his niece/daughter Nina (James) Davis and niece Vicki (Russell) Smith, two sisters and several nieces and nephews.

Larry was preceded in death by his parents Aron and Ruby Smith, his first wife Patricia, his brother Donald Smith and nephew Russell Smith.

A celebration of life for Larry will be held at 1 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 21 at the American Legion, 129 Michigan Ave, South Haven, Michigan.

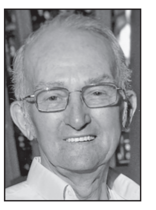
Donations in Larry's name can be made to the American Legion or V.F.W.

Those wishing to share a memory of Larry online may do so at www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

Bill Brinks

Sept. 30, 1932 – Sept. 2, 2025



Bill passed away peacefully surrounded by his family on Sept. 2, 2025.

He was born on Sept. 30, 1932, in South Haven, Mich., the 10th of 13 children born to Harm and Clara Brinks.

His formative years were spent working, learning and enjoying life on the small family farm located on "Brinks Road."

On Oct. 27, 1951, he married Gladys Faux and together they have shared 73 years of marriage and four children.

Bill was a hard-working person always ready to lend a helping hand; he was the first one there and the last one to go home.

After growing up with such a large family he learned to be very resourceful and had the ability to build or fix just about anything. This helped shape his future for working in maintenance at National Motors where he worked for many years finally retiring from Holland Hitch.

Throughout his adult life Bill was also a partner with his brother in the family business of Brinks Brothers & Son Well Drilling. This was his true passion and he continued working in the business well into his retirement years.

Bill is survived by his wife Gladys and children Edward Brinks, Marc (Diane) Brinks, Gary (Leslie) Brinks and Patti Brinks, 11 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren as well as many nieces and nephews.

He is preceded by his parents, 12 brothers and sisters and a very special grandson.

A visitation will be held from 3 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 21, 2025 at the Filbrandt Chapel 1076 S. Bailey Ave South Haven, Michigan.

To those who choose to leave a memory or condolence go to www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements are entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

TOSSED

From page A1

The document the Michigan Republicans signed during a Dec. 14, 2020, gathering said they were Michigan's "duly elected and qualified" presidential electors and was eventually used by Trump advisers in an unsuccessful attempt to overturn his loss to Biden.

Biden had won Michigan's 16 electoral votes by defeating Trump by about 154,000 votes or 3 percentage points, 51%-48 percent, in the November 2020 election.

The GOP electors pleaded not guilty and have contended they were acting on the advice of Republican lawyers and had no intent to defraud anyone – a required element of the charges.

About two dozen supporters of the Michigan Republican activists facing prosecution gathered outside of the courthouse an hour before the court hearing, chanting "Free the 15" and holding handmade signs that read "End Political Lawfare," "Nessel's Hoax," "Aren't there REAL Crimes to Prosecute?" and "Stop the Fake Charges!"

As defendants and their attorneys passed by, they stopped to thank the group for their support.

Robyn Peake, president of the Republican Women's Federation of Michigan, found some encouragement in the delays in the case.

"There's a possibility that they have been testing the political winds and how things have changed since Trump's current term to see what is the public opinion and what is the tone of the United States at this point," Peake said. "We've seen a lot of changes in the last almost 12 months and I think the political tone right now is different in the United States than it what it was."

But Tom McMillin, a Republican member of the State Board of Education and former state lawmaker from Troy, expressed frustration with the length of the court process so far.

"These are years and years these people have had it over their head and she enjoys it," McMillin said of Nessel's office.

Sam Harris, a trustee for Waterford Township, called the case a "political prosecution."

"It's been going on for five years," Harris said. "A lot of these people are older, it's hurt them financially, bankrupt some, it's affected their health."

'A politically motivated witch hunt'

On July 18, 2023, Nessel first announced eight felony charges against each of the 16 Republicans whose names appeared on the false electoral certificate. The top charges carry a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison. One of the electors, James Renner of Lansing, reached a cooperation agreement with Nessel's office, and the charges were dropped against him.

"The false electors' actions undermined the public's faith in the integrity of our elections and, we believe, also plainly violated the laws by which we administer our elections in Michigan," Nessel said in July 2023.

However, in the preliminary examinations, Nessel's prosecutors often struggled to establish that each of the 15 GOP electors had an intent to defraud. Renner, one of the state's key witnesses, testified that even he thought, at the time of signing, it was a "legitimate process."

"Where's the evidence of any intent that anybody had to commit to crime?" John Freeman, a defense lawyer from Troy, who's representing GOP elector Marian Sheridan of Bloomfield Hills, asked during one of the hearings in 2024.

"It's all wishful thinking," Freeman added. "It's a politically motivated witch hunt that has no basis in the evidence."

Prosecutors have contended that the false certificate itself, social media posts from some of the Republican electors and efforts to submit the false document to the Michigan Legislature and U.S. Congress reveal a scheme to improperly intervene in the 2020 election.

GERLACH

From page A1

had heard about it, so I just did some research on it and suddenly that sounds exactly like what would interest me.

I took a semester off and waited for them to put the program together. I was actually one of the first to go through the sports management program there.

The Grand Valley sports management program, is really good. You have to do two separate internships there. My path was weird, because I was an adult learner, so I was working 40 hours a week, taking five to six classes a week and then got to a point where I had to do an internship on top of it.

I interviewed with East Grand Rapids, met with the athletic director, Tim Johnston, who's one of my mentors now, offered me a position on the spot. I started interning there, and that semester is where I kind of figured it out. I didn't know what I wanted to do when I started at East and realized, "Hey, I think being an athletic director is my path." Didn't necessarily know how to do that quite yet or really what it entailed, but Tim Johnston gave me a lot more responsibility there than I think a regular intern would, just because I was older than a typical college student, too, so I did a lot of game supervision at that point.

I did the part-time internship there that was, like 20 hours a week. The next semester, you're supposed to move into a full-time internship and typically, you have to do it at two different locations.

East Grand Rapids kept me on for the full-time internship, which was pretty cool, because at that point, I'm working 40 hours a week at East Grand Rapids doing game supervision, but I also started to get scheduling responsibilities. He had me reach out to all the schools that we were going to play and actually schedule games with them. Then he offered me a paid position when my internship was up.

Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

South Haven Public Schools Athletic Director Chris Gerlach, a Stevensville native, brings experience from Quincy High School and East Grand Rapids Public Schools.

What drew you to South Haven?

It's kind of coming back home for me a little bit. I really didn't want to leave Quincy, to be honest. When I took over there, there was a lot of blood, sweat and tears that went into molding the program and developing my coaching staff and getting all my policies, procedures and everything into place.

We knew that's not where we wanted to stay long term, but the community accepted us and we had relationships there and so we knew that we there was a chance that we could stay there longer.

I wasn't looking at all, but the previous AD had emailed it out that this position was opening up and I said, I can't not apply for that. I mean, it's a great area (and) it's a great community.

My wife, she just entered her third trimester for our first kid. She's 28 weeks pregnant with our daughter. The timing was just kind of impeccable.

Do you have any goals or plans as the South Haven athletic director?

What I've been talking to all my coaches about is, I'm not trying to rock the boat when I first get here. Starting in August, it's really tough to come in and like, really make some substantial changes right away, because I don't know what those changes need to be. My whole first year is kind of figuring out what needs to be done and what needs to be put in place to be able to take us to the next level.

I mean, our size right now, we're 550 kids, we're the biggest school in our conference of 16 schools. I think that the main goal is to be highly competitive in conference and then make a deep run in postseason.

My main goal would be for a lot of our sports is just to increase the participation numbers. If you look at football, we have pretty low participation numbers right now. Couple of other sports (have) lower participation numbers and some other sports have a little bit higher. It's hit or miss, depending on the team.

My main focus would just be to get as many kids participating. One of my biggest things is I want to provide as many opportunities to as many kids as possible. So, if we can get more kids in playing then that's the ultimate goal.

Did you play any sports in school?

So at Lakeshore, I played football and then I threw track and field – I was a discus thrower. I really wasn't the best athlete. I relate a lot more to those kids who, like I said, aren't necessarily going to college to play sports, because I was that kid.

Besides sports, do you have any other talents, favorite activities or hobbies?

I don't. Being an athletic director, honestly, it's not really a full-time job, it's a lifestyle. Even when I'm at home, I'm just trying to relax when I can, because I'm not going to have that much time to relax. I talk a lot about my wife, but my wife is a huge part of my life. I don't think that I would have gotten through the last three years as an athletic director if it wasn't for her.

In my free time, honestly, I devote to my wife and we don't have a kid yet, but my dog. When we're home, I'm trying to just focus on them and hang out with them.

Just being with family is my hobby right now, which is good because I like spending as much time as I can with my wife.

Been getting a little into gardening, but nothing extensive. I've got like five tomato plants right now.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

Al-Van Humane Society

Adopt ♥ Volunteer ♥ Donate ♥ Advocate

73303 8th Ave. PO Box 421 South Haven, MI 49090
phone 269.637.5062 fax 269.639.2242
Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pets of the Week, Kong!

Meet our Pets of the Week, Kong! With his striking good looks and piercing gaze, Kong might look like he's deep in thought solving world problems… but don't be fooled. This 2-year-old husky is actually a goofball at heart! Beneath that dignified exterior is a fun-loving guy who's always ready to strut his stuff on a walk and show off his playful side. Kong does well with kids and other dogs. He is all about adventure and he walks like he owns the sidewalk (and honestly, we kind of let him). He's got that classic husky charm, wrapped up in a picture-perfect coat and a tail that says, "Yes, I know I'm fabulous." If you're looking for a walking buddy, a playtime pal, and a ridiculously photogenic best friend, Kong is your guy. Kong is neutered, microchipped, vaccinated and heartworm negative. If you are interested in adopting Kong, please fill out an application at al-van.org/adopt

PAR 4 PAWS

There's still time to sign-up for Al-Van's annual Par 4 Paws golf outing on September 21st. Enjoy a fun filled day on the greens and support all the animals here at Al-Van Humane Society. Following golfing there will be a delicious lunch and silent auction. To register visit us online at al-van.org/par4paws or give us a call at (269)637-5062.

FALL MICROCHIP CLINIC

Keep your pet safe this fall and every season! Sign-up today for Al-Van Humane Society's fall microchip clinic. Give your pet a lifetime of security and peace of mind for you for just $25 per pet. Space is limited, so we encourage you to sign up early to secure your spot. Call our Adoption Center at (269)637-5062 to sign-up.

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST

Purina Dry Puppy Food and 13 Gallon Trash Bags

This Week's Wishlist This week our biggest need is cleaning supplies. Keeping our shelter sparkling clean isn't just about looking nice, it's about keeping our animals healthy and comfortable! Supplies like medium and large latex gloves, paper towels, trash bags and dish soap help us maintain a safe, sanitary space for all the pets in our care. Every roll, bottle, or box makes a big difference!

BANKING IN PERSON

Your business deserves more than just a bank—it deserves a partner.

At Sturgis Bank, you'll find experienced professionals who know you by name and understand your business needs. From business banking solutions to treasury management services, we're here to streamline your operations and help your business grow.

Stop in or give us a call today.

Lisa Crawford
Treasury Management Specialist
Commercial Lending Assistant

365 Center Street
South Haven, MI
(269) 637-6644

STURGIS BANK SOUTH HAVEN BANKING CENTER

www.Sturgis.Bank

Member FDIC

Dive inspection to take place at Dyckman Bridge in South Haven

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The City of South Haven recently announced that an underwater dive inspection will be conducted at the Dyckman Avenue Bridge on Sept. 18

According to a news release, the inspection is to evaluate the condition of underwater structural components and ensure continued safe operation of the bridge.

Great Lakes Engineering Group, LLC is conducting the inspection which is a requirement of the Michigan Department of Transportation.

"Vehicle traffic across Dyckman Avenue Bridge will not be interrupted during the inspection," the release stated. "However, marine traffic will be subject to temporary coordination during active dive operations."

Great Lakes Engineering Group will be authorized to operate a dive boat and deploy divers in the vicinity of the bridge.

Mariners must provide at least 15 minutes advance notice of their approach to allow the safe relocation of divers.

During the inspection the contractor will:

■ Monitor VHF-FM Marine Channel 16 to receive notifications from approaching vessels.

■ Utilize spotters to identify boat traffic.

■ Safely remove divers from the channel to allow vessel passage.

■ Display all lights and shapes required by U.S. Navigation Rules to signal active dive operations.

"Boaters are asked to use caution and remain alert when navigating near the Dyckman Avenue Bridge on the inspection dates," the release stated.

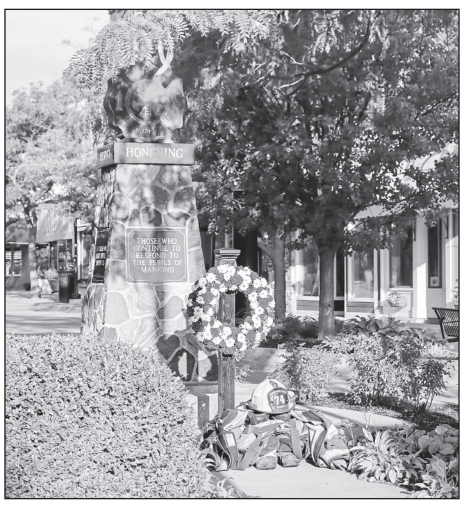
In the event of inclement weather or unforeseen delays, the inspection has a backup date of Sept. 19.

For more information, please contact Mike Dopp, P.E, City Engineer at 269-637-0770 or mdopp@southhavenmi.gov.

HONORING FALLEN HEROES

Photos by Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

South Haven Area Emergency Services Honor Guard stood guard at the downtown South Haven Firefighters Memorial on Thursday to commemorate Patriot Day.



South Haven residents gather Thursday to honor the 343 members of the New York City Fire Department who gave their lives during the events on Sept. 11, 2001.

Members of South Haven Area Emergency Services commemorate Patriot Day on Thursday at the downtown South Haven Firefighters Memorial.

Members of South Haven Area Emergency Services paid tribute at the Firefighters Memorial to commemorate Patriot Day on Thursday.

The South Haven Area Emergency Services Honor Guard stood guard at the downtown South Haven Firefighters Memorial on Thursday as a tribute to the fallen heroes on Sept. 11, 2001.

Photo provided

The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Max Transportation & Car Service as a new member with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

Local entrepreneur launches new car service

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Max Transportation & Car Service as the newest addition to its community of members.

According to a news release, Max Transportation & Car Service is the result of the hard work of a local entrepreneur, Max Gleiss, who has deep roots in the South Haven community.

"I was born and raised just south of South Haven, but have always considered myself part of the community," Founder Max Gleiss said in the release. "My mother owned a chiropractor's office in South Haven for my entire life, and through her, I was able to experience just how welcoming and supportive this community truly is."

After graduating from South Haven High School, Gleiss pursued a bachelor's degree in marketing from Northern Michigan University.

Following several years in California as a freelance web designer, online advertiser and social media manager, Gleiss felt a strong pull to return to his beloved hometown after the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Once back, I taught marketing at Our Lady of the Lake Middle and High School (formerly Lake Michigan Catholic) in St. Joseph for three years," Gleiss said in the release. "While I truly enjoyed teaching, I felt a calling to serve my community in a different way and that's when Max Transportation & Car Service was born."

Max Transportation & Car Service's mission is to provide safe, reliable and personalized transportation services to the Southwest Michigan community.

Gleiss said the inspiration for starting the business stemmed from witnessing the stress many people face when traveling.

"The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce is excited to support Max Transportation & Car Service as they continue to grow and serve the community," the release stated. "Max's mission of putting the needs of the community first aligns perfectly with the chamber's values."

To learn more about Max Transportation & Car Service and the array of transportation services offered, go to drivewithmax.com or call 269-783-9111.

Kids Corner playground project nears completion

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Installation of the final play piece of the second phase of the Kids Corner playground project is underway.

According to a news release, Compton's Inc. is expected to be in the park for the next three to four weeks for curb and site work, play piece installation and site restoration.

"The final play piece for Phase II, called Global Motion, was ordered this spring and is now ready for installation," the release stated.

Global Motion is a freestanding net climber that rotates like a merry go round and is designed for children ages five and up.

"Global Motion will be a nice addition to the variety of play pieces already in the playground area," Parks and Streets Superintendent Aaron Priebe said in the release.

The park and various play structures will remain open for the public during this period, but the work area will be closed off for resident's safety.

For more information, got to the City of South Haven website at www.southhavemi.gov.

For additional questions, contact Aaron Priebe at 269-637-0778.

The South Haven Tribune makes every effort to ensure accuracy in its stories. If you believe there is an error, please contact the editor of the page on which it occurred. If you are unsure who to contact, call 269-637-1104 to be directed to the appropriate editor.

FREE FREE FREE FREE FREE FREE

DUMP DAYS DUMP DAY

GENEVA TOWNSHIP Property Owners

SATURDAY Sept 20, 2025

8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Disposal of NORMAL HOUSEHOLD REFUSE ONLY. ONE (1) TRIP ONLY; One (1) appliance per household. NO REFRIGERATORS.

NO FREE DUMPING of Construction materials, commercial dumping or tires.

RECYCLING - FREE - Save the Environment.

LOCATION: CR 384 - 1 mile east of M-43 OR 1 mile west of 68th Street - North Side.

TRANSFER STATION PASS REQUIRED.

Geneva Township Board

FREE FREE FREE FREE FREE FREE

South Haven Tribune CLASSIFIEDS

Classified Desk: 1-855-317-4292

Hours: Monday - Friday 9am-2pm EST

0100 ANNOUNCEMENTS

WE BUY JUNK CARS!
DAMAGED? TOTALED?
BROKEN? NOT RUNNING?
WRECKED?

CALL 269-500-1711

0200 EMPLOYMENT

Paraprofessional
and
Title I Teacher needed
River Valley School District
Employment Info at:
www.rivervalleyschools.org
Deadline: Until filled

0500 MERCHANDISE

WE BUY
RIDING & COMMERCIAL MOWERS, TRACTORS, ATVS, GOLF CARTS, SCOOTERS, 4X4S, VEHICLES & ALL LAWN EQUIPMENT.

269-500-1711

MOTORCYCLES & SNOWMOBILES WANTED
$$ CASH PAID $$
ALL MAKES AND MODELS

269-500-1711

0600 REAL ESTATE FOR RENT

Low-income housing is available at Covert Housing Commission 2 Bdrm, Wheelchair accessible, Needs at least 2 tenants, Visit our office at 73860 E Lake St. Covert, Mi to fill out an Application

0900 LEGALS

CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN
PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE
PLANNING COMMISSION

On Thursday, October 2, 2025, the Planning Commission for the City of South Haven will hear public comments related to the following request(s). The public hearing(s) will be held at 7:00 P.M. at City Hall, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven concerning the following:

1. Special Land Use Application – 92 Chicago Avenue

Mr. Cody Allkins, on behalf of 92 Chicago LLC, has submitted a special land use application to use the dwelling unit located at 92 Chicago Avenue in the City of South Haven as a short-term rental. The parcel number for the referenced address is 80-53-816-009-00.

Supporting documentation is available for review at the Building Services office, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090. Written comments may be submitted in lieu of or in addition to a personal appearance. Written comments must be received no later than 12 p.m. (noon) on Thursday, October 2, 2025. Written comments should be addressed to the Planning Commission and must be submitted to the Zoning Administrator at kdissette@southhavenmi.gov or via postal mail addressed to the Planning Commission and sent to 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090.

Individuals requesting reasonable accommodation for impairments or disabilities should contact the City Clerk no later than five days prior to the public hearing in person at City Hall, at 269-637-0750, or at mkiker@southhavenmi.gov.

Kelly Getman-Dissette
Zoning Administrator
(269) 637-0760
kdissette@southhavenmi.gov

0900 LEGALS

Notice of Proposed Budget

The proposed budget of the Van Buren Conservation District for fiscal year beginning October 1, 2025, will be presented to the District Board for final approval at the regular monthly board meeting at 10:00 AM, on September 24, 2025. The Public is invited to comment on the proposed budget. Copies of the budget are available at the District Office, located at 1035 E. Michigan Ave., Paw Paw, MI 49079.

Upon request to the District Executive Director, the District shall make reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities to be able to participate in this meeting. If you have any questions, please call 269-633-9054 or email director@vanburencd.org.

Emilly Hickmott, Executive Director
Van Buren Conservation District

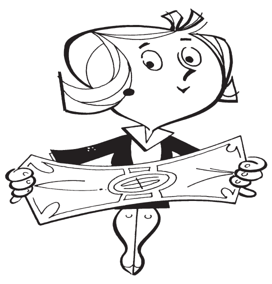
PUBLIC/LEGAL NOTICES

To place a public notice, please send your requests to **legals@pmginmi.com.**

Please allow 48 hours to process, larger legals may need at least four business days.

RESERVE THIS SPACE TODAY!

MAKE SOME MONEY



IN THE CLASSIFIEDS TODAY!

ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS
South Haven Public Schools
Administration & Transportation Renovation

PROJECT DESCRIPTION
Renovation to existing Armory building to provide new space for Administration and Transportation as well as a parking lot for buses. PLEASE NOTE: This is **NOT** a prevailing wage rate job.

BID PROPOSAL
Sealed bids, in triplicate, for the Administration & Transporation Renovations will be received at **South Haven Public Schools Administration Building located at 554 Green Street, South Haven MI 49090 until September 25, 2025, at 3:30 pm local time**, or delivered to GDK Construction, 12 W. 8th Street, Ste #250, Holland, MI 49423 on September 25, 2025, until 2:00 pm local time. **Bids received after this time will neither be considered nor accepted. The bid opening will be a public opening at 4:00 pm located in the Media Center at the South Haven High School, located at 600 Elkenburg St, South Haven, MI 49090.**
All proposals received by the time and date stated above will be opened and read publicly.
In accordance with Section 1267 of the Revised School Code each bid must be accompanied by a sworn and notarized Familiar Disclosure Statement completed by the bidder disclosing any familiar relationships between the Owner or any employee of the Bidder and any member of the District's Board of Education or the Superintendent of the District.

SITE INSPECTION
A construction **pre-bid meeting** will be held at **the existing Armory building where this project will take place** on **September 11 at 10:30 am** local time to allow bidders to look around the facility. All bidders are encouraged to attend.

BID DOCUMENTS
The Bidding Documents may be viewed via GDK Construction's Datto Workplace site at https://gdk.workplace.datto.com/filelink/6b471-2e496df3-9bf9c74244-2 or at Grand Rapids Builders Exchange. Bidding Documents will be available after **September 4**. Please note that contractors are responsible to review information on all drawings and specifications. **Please notify GDK of your intent to bid or not bid as soon as possible. This ensures you receive all current bidding documentation. Please email Lisa Knoll at lknoll@gdkconstruction.com.**

BIDDER QUALIFICATIONS
Bidders submitting a Bid for this Project shall have qualifications as follows: a. shall be a reputable, recognized organization, with at least five (5) years successful experience on work of this type and scope of this project; b. shall have a license where required by public authorities having jurisdiction, c. shall have ample financial resources for work of this magnitude.

BID SECURITY – PERFORMANCE BONDS
Each bid shall be accompanied by good and sufficient bid security or bid bond in an amount not less than 5% of the Bid amount and shall secure the Owner from loss or damage by reason of the withdrawal of the Bid by a Bidder or by failure of the successful Bidder to enter into a Contract with the Owner if his Bid is accepted by the Owner.
The successful Bidder will be required to secure Performance, Labor and Material bonds for all contracts exceeding $50,000 from a surety company having a rating of A- or better, for the full amount of the Contract.

Classifieds Make a Cash Connection!

Classifieds Make A Cash Connection!

Casey's General Store breaks ground in Hartford

By TRIBUNE STAFF

HARTFORD — Casey's General Stores, one of the nation's leading convenience store chains, held a groundbreaking ceremony for its newest location in Hartford.

The ceremony took place at 1 p.m. Thursday at 61827 County Road 687. Hartford's local leaders welcomed the business partners and community members during the celebration.

"Hartford continues to grow and thrive," Hartford City Manager Nicol Pulluiam said in a news release. "The new construction of Casey's will not only create jobs and additional taxes, but also provide our residents and visitors with a reliable place to stop for quality food and fuel."

The groundbreaking kicks off the construction of a new convenience store designed to meet the needs of Hartford residents and travelers passing through the area.

Once completed, this Casey's location will bring the company's "well-known food, fuel, and friendly service to the heart of Van Buren County." The Casey's will also include the creation of new job opportunities for residents in the Hartford area.

City officials have expressed their support for the development, acknowledging the benefits this store could bring to the community.

"I would like to welcome Casey's General Stores to the community of Hartford, Mich.," Mayor Rick Hall said in the release. "Their $1.85 million investment in the city of Hartford will benefit us all with local job opportunities and bring people to the Hartford area. I would like to thank the team at Casey's and all the people involved in making this day become a reality."

Report: SWMI housing sales fall in July from 2024

Selling prices decline halfway through 2025

By LAUREN RICE
For The Herald-Palladium

In July, Southwest Michigan housing market sales were slightly higher than the month before, but fell from the same time period last year.

According to a report from the Southwestern Michigan Association of Realtors, 299 homes were sold in July of 2024 – compared to 264 in July of this year.

"Homebuyers benefitted from lower selling prices in July compared to those in June," said Luke Jeffries, association executive at the Southwestern Michigan Association of Realtors. "Selling prices reached their highest level compared to a year ago and for the last 20 years in the year-over-year comparison."

For the year-to-date comparison, the number of homes sold increased by 2 percent, from 1,516 at this time last year to 1,549 so far in 2025.

The inventory of houses for sale grew by 9 percent from July of 2024. At the end of June, there was a six-month supply of houses, an increase from the 4.9-month supply available in June. This inventory level is what is available for homebuyers looking at for-sale listings across Allegan, Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties.

This July, the average selling price for houses also rose by 10 percent, jumping from $387,290 in July of 2024 to $424,977 in July of this year. However, June of 2025 is still the record for highest average selling price at $430,096.

Year-to-date, the average selling price increased by 15 percent, from $364,240 to $418,170.

The median selling price this July increased by 8 percent from July of 2024. And year-to-date, the median selling price rose 7 percent to $290,000 from $270,000 in July of 2024.

The Freddie Mac mortgage rate in July was 6.72, which is down from 6.77 in June, for a 30-year conventional mortgage. Last July, the rate was 6.73.

The decrease in selling prices in July prompted a 3 percent decrease in the total dollar volume for the month compared to the same time last year. The year-to-date total dollar volume jumped by 18 percent.

The number of bank-owned or foreclosed home as a percentage of all transactions remained at 3 percent, the same as June, with eight houses.

Across the country

Existing-home sales increased by 2 percent in July, according to the National Association of Realtors report.

Month-over month sales increased in the Northeast, South and West, but fell in the Midwest. Year-over-year, sales rose in the South, Northeast and Midwest, and fell in the West.

Total existing-home sales increased 2 percent in total sales month-over-month to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.01 million in July.

"The ever-so-slight improvement in housing affordability is inching up home sales," NAR chief economist Lawrence Yun said. "Wage growth is now comfortably outpacing home price growth, and buyers have more choices. Homebuyers are in the best position in more than five years to find the right home and negotiate for a better price. Current inventory is at its highest since May 2020, during the COVID lockdown."

The median existing-home price for all housing types in July was $422,400, up 0.2 percent from last year, marking the 25th consecutive month of year-over-year price increases.

In the Midwest, existing-home sales decreased 1.1 percent month-over-month to an annual rate of 940,000, up 1.1 percent year-over-year.

First-time homebuyers were responsible for 28 percent of sales in July, which is down from 30 percent in June and 29 percent in July 2024.

All cash sales accounted for 31 percent of transactions in July, up from 29 percent in June and 27 percent in July 2024.

Total housing inventory registered at the end of July was 1.55 million units, up 0.6 percent from June and increased 15.7 percent from July 2024. Unsold inventory sits at a 4.6-month supply, down from 4.7 months in June and up from four months in July 2024.

Contact: lrice@TheHP.com, 932-0360

Photo provided / Mark Bugnaski Photography

Planting trees along a lakeshore can help filter pollutants and keep our lakes clean and healthy.

VB Conservation District launches inland lake project

By TRIBUNE STAFF

The Van Buren Conservation District and Michigan Lakes and Streams Association announced a grant project to plant 4,900 trees and shrubs around six inland lakes in Southwest Michigan.

According to a news release, the program is free for landowners, and the trees will be planted by a contractor. This free tree program is a great way to add wildlife habitat, privacy fences or replace aging trees.

This tree planting project will reduce runoff and improve the quality of water in lakes and streams, as well as provide wildlife habitat near Round Lake, Gravel Lake and Eagle Lake in Van Buren County, as well as and Harwood Lake, Birch Lake and Baldwin Lake in Cass County. These trees will capture and filter about 440,000 gallons of runoff water.

Private property owners on these six lakes who are interested in having trees planted on their property at no cost are encouraged to reach out now. A brief interest form is available at https://tinyurl.com/lakes-trees.

The first planting will be this fall, the release stated.

Those interested in the project are invited to attend a seminar hosted by the Michigan Lakes and Streams Association on Sept. 23 at Porter Township Hall in Van Buren County from 5-8 p.m. Attendees can reserve a seat by emailing Melissa DeSimone at melissa.desimone@mymlsa.org. Presenters will include Julia Kirkwood of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy and Erin Fuller of the Van Buren Conservation District.

This collaborative project is supported by key partner organizations including the Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, EGLE, Michigan State University Extension, and the St. Joe River Basin Commission. This project is made possible by a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant through the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Photos provided

the South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Phoenix Road Animal Hospital as a new member with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

South Haven chamber celebrates veterinary clinic

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Phoenix Road Animal Hospital was recently welcomed as a new member of the South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce.

According to a news release, the chamber held a ribbon cutting ceremony at the facility located at 70060 Phoenix Rd.

"Founded nearly 30 years ago by Dr. Lisa Bucht, Phoenix Road Animal Hospital has been a trusted name in pet care for generations of South Haven families," the release stated. "Dr. Bucht personally designed the clinic with both clients and patients in mind, ensuring a warm and welcoming space for pets and their owners alike."

Phoenix Road Animal Hospital is a small animal general practice that offers a wide range of veterinary services in South Haven.

Phoenix Road Animal Hospital is a small animal general practice that offers a wide range of veterinary services, including wellness care, radiology, in-house bloodwork and microscopic analysis.

Beyond serving patients, Dr. Bucht shares her expertise with the Al-Van Humane Society, dedicating her time and knowledge to support local animals in need.

The hospital's mission emphasizes the bond between pets and their owners by stating "All the best for your best friend."

According to the release, Phoenix Road Animal Hospital is not currently accepting new clients, however the practice is growing and looks to have availability again soon.

"In the meantime, community members are encouraged to stop by, say hello and meet the dedicated team," the release stated.

For more information about Phoenix Road Animal Hospital, go to www.phoenixroadvet.com.

Exceptional Neuro Care

When it comes to a brain or spine condition, you want a team of experts you can put your trust in right from the start. You'll find them at Bronson — the region's most comprehensive neuroscience center. Our specialists are skilled in treating a wide variety of neurological and neurosurgical conditions and work closely together to ensure each patient's care is carefully guided from testing and diagnosis all the way through treatment and rehabilitation. For exceptional care, we're the people to turn to.

Learn more at bronsonhealth.com/neuro.

BRONSON

SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

South Haven Center for the Arts: "Altered Consumerism" exhibition from Aug. 8 through Sept. 20.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1-4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays starting Sept. 2.

South Haven Farm Market: Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. through October at Huron Street Pavilion.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Lake Arvesta: Summer at the pasture concert every Friday and Saturday at 6 p.m.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: New Exhibit – "The Adventures of Liberty Hyde Bailey – Chicago: 1872." Available during museum hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: "Stepping Stones" by Carol Trembath and David W. Craig Storywalk. Available through Sept. 31.

September

15 – Soccer: Middle school boys against Coloma High School at North Shore Elementary School.

15 – Soccer: Boys varsity against Coloma High School at 6 p.m.

16 – Listening Session: Economic development strategic plan revision listening session from 5 to 7 p.m. at City Hall. Facilitated by Economic Development Consultant Jim Hettinger. All are welcome.

Photo provided / Tom Renner

Sofia Grieves competing in the butterfly stroke as the Rams win the 200 Medley Relay against Harper Creek on Sept. 9.

16 – Swimming: Girls varsity against Allegan Public Schools at 6 p.m.

16 – Rotary Club: Evening meeting at the American Legion beginning at 5:30 p.m. Jordan Alsup from Beachwalk Properties will present.

17 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

17 – Volleyball: Girls middle school against Black River Public School.

17 – Football: Boys middle school against Allegan Public Schools at 5 p.m.

18 – After Business Ours: Networking event hosted by South Haven Banking Center. For South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce members only. From 5 to 7 p.m. RSVP required.

18 – Tennis: Boys varsity against Hackett Catholic Prep at 4:30 p.m.

18 – First Baptist Church: Blood drive from 1 to 6 p.m.

19 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy Play Fridays for preschoolers from 11 a.m. to noon.

19 – Football: Boys varsity against Constantine High School at 7 p.m.

20 – South Haven Memorial Library: STEM Saturdays from 11 a.m. to noon.

23 – Tennis: Boys varsity against Buchanan High School at 4:30 p.m.

23 – Rotary Club: Club assembly.

24 – Soccer: Boys middle school against Fennville High School at North Shore Elementary School.

24 – Volleyball: Girls middle school against Watervliet High School.

24 – Soccer: Boys junior varsity against Fennville High School at 5 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

24 – Soccer: Boys varsity against Fennville High School at 6:30 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

24 – Historical Association of South Haven: "Genealogy for Beginners" presentation by Katherine Wilson from 7 to 8 p.m.

25 – South Haven Memorial Library: Night of decoupaging from 5:30 to 7 p.m.

25 – Gingerman Raceway: Track Night from 1:30 to 8:30 p.m.

25 – Volleyball: Girls junior varsity against Martin Public Schools at 5:30 p.m.

25 – Volleyball: Girls freshman against Gobles middle and high school at 5:30 p.m.

25 – Volleyball: Girls varsity against Martin Public Schools at 6:30 p.m.

26 – South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce: Golf Outing starting at 9 a.m. at Beeches Golf Club. Registration required.

26 – Football: Boys varsity against Parchment High School at 7 p.m.

26 – Bumbleberry Acres: Date Night on the Farm from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Adults only. $20 for individuals, $30 for couples.

26 – South Haven Memorial Library: South Haven Writers read-around from 1 to 4 p.m. New writers welcome.

27 – YDC South Haven: Oktoberfest Pancake Breakfast fundraiser from 8 to 11 a.m. $10 per person.

27 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club at 11 a.m. Registration is recommended.

27-28 – Hartford Fall Festival: From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday at the Hartford Public Library.

28 – Gingerman Raceway: Track Night from 1:30 to 8:30 p.m.

29 – Soccer: Boys middle school against Black River Public School at North Shore Elementary School.

29 – Soccer: Boys junior varsity against Black River Public School at 5 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

29 – Soccer: Boys varsity against Black River Public School at 6:30 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

October

1 – Soccer: Boys middle school against Watervliet at 5 p.m. at North Shore Elementary School.

1 – Soccer: Boys junior varsity against Rockford at 5 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

1 – Soccer: Boys varsity against Rockford at 6:30 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

1 – Volleyball: Middle school girls against Fennville at 5:30 p.m.

2 – Golf: Girls varsity at 9 a.m. at Hawkshead Links.

2 – Tennis: Boys varsity against Three Rivers at 4 p.m.

2 – Volleyball: Girls junior varsity against Lawton at 5:30 p.m.

2 – Volleyball: Girls freshman against Black River at 5:50 p.m.

2 – Volleyball: Girls varsity against Lawton at 6:30 p.m.

2 – Football: Boys junior varsity against Watervliet at 6 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

4 – Bumbleberry Acres: Princess, Superhero and Unicorn Day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

6 – Soccer: Boys middle school against Fennville at 5 p.m.

6 – Volleyball: Girls middle school against coloma at 5:30 p.m.

7 – Volleyball: Girls junior varsity against Fennville at 5:30 p.m.

7 – Volleyball: Girls freshman against Fennville at 5:30 p.m.

7 – Volleyball: Girls varsity against Fennville at 6:30 p.m.

9 – Volleyball: Girls varsity against Berrien Springs at 1 p.m.

9- Volleyball: Girls junior varsity against Berrien Springs at 2 p.m.

9 – Football: Boys junior varsity against Kalamazoo Christian at 6 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

10 – Bumbleberry Acres: Date Night on the Farm from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Adults only. $20 for individuals, $30 for couples.

14 – Swimming: Girls varsity against Plainwell at 6 p.m.

16 – Volleyball: Girls middle school against Bridgeman at 5:30 p.m.

17 – Football: Boys varsity against Allegan at 7 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

19 – Scott Club: Jazz Pianist Xavier Davis presents "An Afternoon of Jazz." Free concert, RSVP required.

20 – Volleyball: Girls middle school against Saugatuck at 5:30 p.m.

24 – Football: Boys varsity against Galesburg-Augusta at 7 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

26 – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: Pumpkin Boo-Walk starting at 6:45 p.m.

Hollier dropping Congress bid to run for Michigan secretary of state

By MELISSA NANN BURKE
The Detroit News (TNS)

DETROIT — One of the Democrats running against two-term U.S. Rep. Shri Thanedar says he's dropping out of the primary contest to seek the party's nomination in the statewide secretary of state race instead, leaving state Rep. Donovan McKinney as the congressman's most prominent challenger, for now.

Former state Sen. Adam Hollier of Detroit credited his decision in part to conversations he had with voters in Michigan's 13th Congressional District questioning whether there would be a 2026 election because of the "narrative" pushed by President Donald Trump.

"I just got to a place where I felt like a place that I needed to be was where the biggest fight was, and I think that's in Lansing," Hollier said, "to make sure that votes are counted here in Michigan, to make sure that people have faith in their process, and to ensure that ... we have somebody strong in secretary of state's position to make sure that Michigan voters can feel confident that their ballots are going to be counted correctly."

The Detroit News first reported on Sunday that Hollier was planning to drop out of the U.S. House race.

The nomination for secretary of state will be decided at a Michigan Democratic Party state convention next year, with Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum and current Deputy Secretary of State Aghogho Edevbie already competing in that race. Hollier said he'll tout his service as a veteran, his time in Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's cabinet and his advocacy efforts during the last redistricting cycle.

For the U.S. House seat, McKinney has a clearer shot at targeting Thanedar with Hollier out of the race. But he still faces an uphill fight with the congressman sitting on an $8 million war chest that's funded in part by the Thanedar campaign's investments in cryptocurrency.

"Thanedar has benefited from a splintering of the African-American vote in the city and, if the field remains the same, that might not materialize this time," said David Dulio, a political scientist at Oakland University, after Hollier dropped out.

"Things can still change, though. We're seven months away from the filing deadline."

In addition to McKinney, Democrats Shelby Campbell and Nazmul Hassan, Republican Andrew Lorenz and Green Party candidate D.Etta Wilcoxon have filed paperwork to run.

Other candidates may still jump into the Democratic primary contest, including Detroit City Council member Mary Waters, who lost to Thanedar last fall. Waters told The Detroit News on Tuesday that she's focused on her reelection to City Council's at-large seat.

"It's still a long road to success and victory for anyone who is running against an incumbent who has a war chest of personal funds sitting there at his disposal," Democratic consultant Mario Morrow said of Thanedar. "You got to raise a ton of money. ... Adam Hollier saw the writing on the wall."

Democratic leaders in the community and Thanedar's past challengers have expressed a desire to restore majority-Black Detroit's African-American representation in Congress, which was lost for the first time in nearly 70 years when Thanedar, an Indian American, won a nine-way primary in 2022 with 28 percent to Hollier's second-place showing of 24 percent.

"But you have to give the guy credit, his constituents like him," Morrow said of Thanedar. "They haven't seen anything that discourage them from supporting him in the future, so McKinney or whoever has to come out with some strong messaging that would discourage some folks from supporting Shri Thanedar."

McKinney did snag some major endorsements earlier this year from progressive Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Detroit, but he posted a modest fundraising haul of just $272,000 last quarter.

Hollier, notably, didn't endorse McKinney this week when leaving the race.

Hollier ran for the 13th District in 2022 and 2024 but, after launching his latest bid in April, wasn't able to garner the same support he got last year from top Democrats like Wayne County Executive Warren Evans and former U.S. Rep. Brenda Lawrence of Southfield.

After touting that high-profile support last year, Hollier ended up dropping out in June 2024 after he was disqualified from the ballot over signatures that had been forged and duplicated by circulators.

Thanedar went onto clinch a three-way primary contest in August 55 percent of the vote and easily win a second term last fall in the Democrat-heavy district.

"I've been very clear that I think Shri Thanedar is not the right member of Congress to represent Detroit," Hollier said.

"I am super hopeful and excited for the potential for Detroit to have a Black member of Congress again and continue to be really committed to the happening and hopeful that folks like Warren Evans and Brenda Lawrence and Wendell Anthony ... can come together and lead on getting a candidate that can win the 13th Congressional District, and that will be a good representative to us."

The Spotlight
A Weekly Guide To Services & Business Around Town.

Confused about your health insurance options?
Under 65 health plan available now
Call Dale K. Morgan "DK"
Your local Medicare expert since 1994
269-637-6619

JENSEN'S EXCAVATING INCORPORATED
Driveways • Water & Sewer • Septic Systems • Demolition
Crushed Concrete • Sand • Gravel • Stone • Topsoil
www.JensensExcavating.com
(269) 637-5642

Driver's License Restoration
It's a Process... We Can Help!
Drunk Driving & Criminal Defense
"Friends... Don't Let Friends Plead Guilty!"
Law Office of Frederick J. Taylor
269-388-6060 1-800-250-FRED

MILLER
D.L. MILLER FUNERAL HOME, INC.
Bangor Chapel
258 W. Monroe Street
Bangor, MI 49013
(269) 427-7551
Ryan K. Oliver, Owner/Manager
Bloomingdale Chapel
203 East Spring
P.O. Box 171
Bloomingdale, MI 49026
(269) 521-3121
Floyd Decker, Manager
Gobles Chapel
208 West Main
P.O. Box 6
Gobles, MI 49055
(269) 628-2852
D. Lee Miller, Manager

If interested in including your business here contact freid@thehp.com

R/J Waterproofing & Contractors
Wet Basement?
• Internal/External Drain Tile Systems
• Water Seepage - Structural Wall & Floor Cracks
• Damp Wet Crawl Spaces
• Bowed & Cracked Walls
• Sump Pump/Emergency Backup System
• Mold Removal & Drywall Repair
24 Hour Emergency Service
Roger Joyner
LOCAL 269-337-7660 • Cell 269-501-0915
EXPERIENCED IN ALL METHODS OF BASEMENT WATERPROOFING

Green gruel? Pea soup?

What Westerners thought of matcha when they tried it for the first time

By REBECCA CORBETT
Japanese Studies Librarian and Senior Lecturer in History, University of Southern California (The Conversation)

'Matcha mania" shows no signs of slowing, with global demand pushing "supply chains to the brink," as Australia's ABC News reported in July 2025.

The powdered drink retains a massive following in Tokyo, where long lines of customers snake out of The Matcha Tokyo on any given Saturday. At the trendy, minimalist cafe, the staff uses a cast-iron kettle and a bamboo ladle. Both are a nod to the traditional Japanese way of preparing matcha, called "chanoyu," which literally means "hot water for tea" but in English has been translated as "tea ceremony."

Beyond Tokyo, matcha cafes and bars have also become a familiar sight in Western cities, from Stockholm to Melbourne to Los Angeles. Matcha has been a permanent fixture on the menu at Starbucks since 2019 and at Dunkin' since 2020.

It's been quite the rise for a drink long met with skepticism in the West.

World's fairs serve as a stage

I spent part of 2024 as a Japan Foundation Fellow at Waseda University, where I researched how Westerners experienced matcha and chanoyu during the Meiji period, an era of rapid modernization and Westernization that lasted from 1868 to 1912.

Matcha is a form of green tea in which young tea leaves have been ground to a powder using a stone mill. Unlike other teas, which involve steeping leaves and removing them before drinking, matcha powder is then whisked into hot water.

Matcha actually originated in China. It was introduced to Japan around 1250 C.E., where it assumed a key role in chanoyu from the 1500s on. Portuguese Jesuit missionaries in Japan in the 1500s wrote about both matcha and chanoyu. But only in the 19th century did interest in matcha really take off outside Japan.

Beginning in the late 19th century, world's fairs and expositions started being held in European and American cities. These events allowed countries from around the world to showcase their art, inventions and culture before huge audiences.

For emerging Japan, world's fairs and expositions presented a tremendous opportunity. In its exhibits, Japanese representatives often gave chanoyu demonstrations, while both the Japanese government and tea industry heavily marketed all varieties of Japanese green tea, including matcha.

Initial skepticism

Though steeped Japanese green tea became popular in 19th-century America, where it was usually sipped with milk and sugar, matcha didn't initially jibe with Western palates.

Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore, an American journalist and travel writer who spent decades living in Japan, described matcha as "a bowl of green gruel more bitter than quinine" in her 1891 book "Jinrikisha Days in Japan."

Wealthy Canadian tourist Katharine Schuyler Baxter detailed her experience at a matcha tea gathering in her 1895 book "In Beautiful Japan: A Story of Bamboo Lands."

"The beverage is made of powdered leaves, is greenish in color, thick like pea-soup, fragrant, and not very palatable," she wrote. In my research, I encountered "pea soup" being the most common descriptor of matcha at this time.

Descriptions of matcha and chanoyu also abound in newspaper articles from the era.

Canadian journalist Helen E. Gregory-Flesher described the Japanese tea ceremony for readers in San Francisco.

"Very few Europeans can drink it without feeling very unhappy," she wrote of a thick preparation of matcha called "koicha." "For in the first place the taste is not agreeable, and then it is so intensely strong that it is sure to disagree with them if they do manage to swallow it."

For the St. Louis Globe Democrat, the Countess Anna de Montaigu reported on a tea gathering she attended at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. She described matcha's flavor as "exquisite," but left her American readers with a warning: "Drunk without sugar or cream, this expensive tea … is not pleasant to the palate of the uninitiated."

Embracing the ceremony

There are also records of a few Westerners studying chanoyu while living in Japan. While those records don't include their thoughts on matcha, I have to assume they enjoyed drinking it – at least enough to continue their practice, since in all cases they studied chanoyu for several years.

Chanoyu isn't a simple serving ceremony. It's a practice that involves learning the range of ways to serve and receive matcha, as well as food, and it's taught by various "lineages," or schools.

Lessons involve students learning how to be a host and a guest through observation and practice. All of this learning is put into practice by hosting or being a guest at a formal tea gathering, called a "chaji." This can last three to four hours and include a multicourse meal – the "kaiseki" – several rounds of sake, and the laying and replenishing of charcoal.

There are two servings of matcha; one is prepared as thick tea – koicha – the other as thinner tea known as "usucha." Each is accompanied by sweets.

A Swedish woman named Ida Trotzig lived in Japan from 1888 to 1921, during which she took lessons in chanoyu. Upon returning to Sweden she published a book about chanoyu in 1911, "Cha-no-yu Japanernas teceremoni." American Mary Averil also studied both chanoyu and ikebana, the art of Japanese flower arrangement.

In 1905, the Urasenke School of Tea in Kyoto welcomed three American sisters, Helen, Grace and Florence Scottfield, as students. There, they studied under the head of the school, and a photograph of all three girls wearing kimonos with their hair styled in a Japanese manner appeared in an issue of the school's monthly magazine in 1908.

Matcha minus chanoyu

Scholars haven't pinpointed the reasons for the recent global matcha boom. But I think it's worth considering a few factors.

First, it's clear that social media, particularly Instagram and TikTok, have played a big role. The bright green beverage is aesthetically pleasing. Its many purported health benefits have also allowed it to join the ranks of other viral superfoods, such as acai berries and kombucha.

Then there's the way Westerners often mythologize Japan as a source of "ancient wisdom." Accompanying that is a particular infatuation with traditional Japanese practices, lifestyles and foods – matcha included.

Finally, people seem drawn to the minimalist aesthetics associated with chanoyu, which have echoes in other Japanese practices such as dry rock gardening and calligraphy.

Interestingly, the vast majority of matcha drinkers today don't experience chanoyu, even as matcha purveyors borrow from the practice's aesthetics. In the late 19th century, you couldn't drink matcha without first experiencing chanoyu. And the drink was always served "straight" – no milks, flavorings or sweeteners.

Sometimes I wonder what the Countess de Montaigu would order if she visited Pipers Tea and Coffee, which is rated the best matcha in St. Louis on Yelp. Would she prefer it straight? Or would she be won over by its In Bloom Latte – a vanilla matcha latte topped with cherry blossom-sakura cold foam?

This article is republished from The Conversation under a Creative Commons license.

THE CONVERSATION

shirophoto / Getty Images

FOCUS

Photos by Myung J. Chun / Los Angeles Times / TNS

Crushed oyster shells are sprinkled onto mulch as one of the ways of making a filter sock using a burlap sack during a soil remediation class at the Theodore Payne Foundation in Sun Valley, California on Aug. 9. The socks are used to absorb heavy metals like lead and arsenic and is particularly useful for residents whose properties were affected by the January fires. The class was taught by SoilWise, a soil health education and consulting organization.

To clean fire-tainted soil, L.A. residents turn to *nature* to do it themselves

By LILA SEIDMAN
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Leslie Carothers of Altadena, whose house survived the Eaton fire, is proud of her oyster mushroom filter sock that she made at the Theodore Payne Foundation in Sun Valley, California on Aug. 9.The class taught by SoilWise, a soil health education and consulting organization, showed how to make soil remediation filter socks to absorb heavy metals like lead and arsenic. Sally Stowers, left, also lives in Altadena and her house survived too.

Maggie Smart-McCabe of SoilWise, a soil health education and consulting organization, shows the minerals and organic matters in healthy soil in a microscope's view during a soil remediation class at the Theodore Payne Foundation in Sun Valley, California on Aug. 9. The class taught how to make soil remediation filter socks to help soak up heavy metals like lead and arsenic. The information is particularly useful for residents whose properties were affected by the January fires.

LOS ANGELES — Serina Diniega always wanted to plant an avocado tree at her Altadena home, but now she worries the creamy green fruit might pose a threat.

Her yard was scorched in the Eaton fire as her block went up in flames. The planetary scientist's house survived, but unseen contaminants could be lurking in the soil.

"What can I do to keep that tree healthy, hopefully be able to eat the fruit a number of years down the line without worrying about whether or not I'm poisoning my family?" she wondered. The internet was full of opinions, but science was scarce.

So when a DIY soil detoxification workshop came up at a local nursery, she jumped on it. Many others did too; roughly 40 people were waitlisted for the three-hour class led by SoilWise, a landscaping, education and consulting business. Once a niche subject, the firestorms of January have put a spotlight on soil health, as residents wonder if their yards are safe for their children to play or if their home-grown tomatoes are OK to eat.

Learning how plants, compost and other materials combat contamination can be a source of empowerment in the face of disasters that are beyond individual control, and proponents say the approach is more environmentally friendly than conventional alternatives. For some, the tools are also a backstop against inadequate government help.

Harnessing the power of nature

The typical approach to dealing with contaminated dirt is stripping away the topsoil. As part of its post-fire cleanup, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said it would scrape up to 6 inches from fire-destroyed homes.

But in many cases, large swaths of yards and gardens were left out.

That's not real remediation, SoilWise's Genesis Sandoval said during the recent workshop at Theodore Payne Foundation, a native plant nursery and education center in Sun Valley. "It's really just moving a problem from one place to another place."

It historically has ended up on the doorstep of marginalized communities, she added.

Nature provides other tools, though.

Heavy metals such as lead don't break down, so they have to essentially be trapped in certain types of plants, minerals and compost, SoilWise co-founder Lynn Fang said.

There's evidence that buckwheat and bush sunflower can take up lead, and saltbush can ensnare arsenic, Fang said, while non-checking corn, squash and cucumber for their ability to sequester contaminants such as dioxins.

Biochar, a charcoal-like material that some people mix in their garden soil, has pores that can capture metals, Fang said, adding that there's also research indicating it can suck up PFAS, or so-called forever chemicals.

Some nasties, including dioxins, can be broken down by fungi and microbes. Oyster mushrooms excel at chomping down contaminants such as hydrocarbons – even cigarette butts. "They'll turn it into basically, like, mushroom," Fang said.

Workshop attendees got down and (literally) dirty making "ecological filter socks," stuffing things like oak mulch and crushed oyster shells into burlap sacks.

The nitty gritty

The broad strokes of natural detoxification are easy to grasp, but the particulars not so much. For example, in the family of minerals known as zeolites, one might be great at trapping lead while another may not be effective.

Once the absorptive socks or plants have done their job, they may pose a risk themselves. The workshop leaders discussed the possibility of creating a "sacrificial zone," potentially under trees, where materials such as lead-laced plants are composted.

"It can be a lot to take in, especially because soil health is a topic that is becoming more popular, and we're not really used to soil health being taught or being exposed to soil health in as much depth," SoilWise's Maggie Smart-McCabe said.

What lies beneath

After the Eaton and Palisades blazes, federal and state disaster agencies refused to pay to test soil for contaminants on scorched lots – a practice employed in virtually all wildfire recoveries in the recent past.

So researchers with USC in March began to offer the service to L.A. County residents. The free program has focused on screening for lead, a potent neurotoxin that's especially dangerous for kids.

So far, most of the roughly 3,000 samples residents have submitted fall below California's level of potential concern, 80 parts per million.

But a substantial proportion are above that. Some are even in 1,000s, which the state classifies as hazardous waste.

Lead poses a bigger problem in Altadena than in Pacific Palisades, largely because of the former's overall older housing stock, built when homes were coated in leaded paint, said Josh West, a professor of earth sciences and environmental studies at USC.

Yet Palisades residents generally have more money to deal with cleanup.

"The burden that people in Altadena are facing is a much greater proportion of their average income," West said.

Mucked up soil in L.A. didn't begin with the fires

Emissions spewed by factories and innumerable cars also have left their invisible mark on the soil across our urban landscape. So why is soil health suddenly getting so much attention?

Sandoval said the blazes "affected a lot of privileged communities," pointing to a possible explanation rooted in racial and socioeconomic inequity.

For close to a century, a battery recycling plant released heavy metals into communities in South and East L.A., "while government agencies were unresponsive to this community health crisis," according to Prospering Backyards, an initiative launched to address the pollution.

More than 80 percent of soil samples tested in 2022 – seven years after that plant closed – were above the 80 ppm threshold for lead, according to a recent report.

Prospering Backyards has tested applying zeolites (the lead-trapping minerals) to the ground along with layers of mulch and compost. A report from last year found the technique helped reduce exposure to contaminants, according to Maru García, project lead for Prospering Backyards.

That research, which predates the fires, is now being tapped to meet the current crisis.

Galvanized by interest after January's fires, García's group helped develop "healing toolkits," essentially guides focused on dealing with contaminants. They also began holding workshops that she said addressed not just practical concerns but emotional ones.

Many expressed fear and overwhelm. Others were grappling with anger and mistrust. Some couldn't put a name to their feelings.

"I saw just the need to go through this," García said. "And for me it was kind of a confirmation that treatments that are approaching the remediation by itself are not really bringing the whole solution."

Bringing in the feelings

That was true at SoilWise's workshop as well, where anxieties and collective grief commingled with hope.

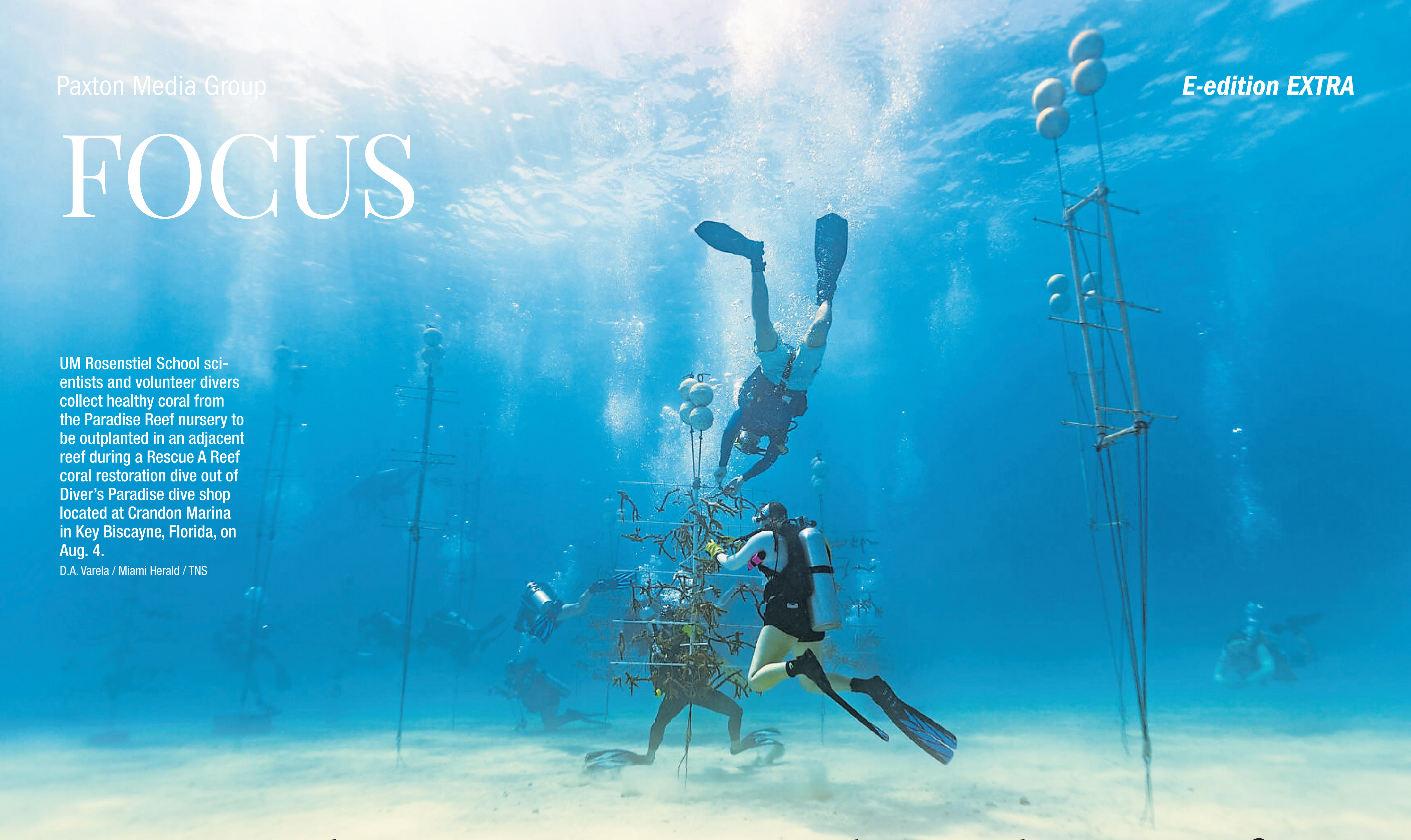
"I worry about the chickens," said Lelas Stone, reflecting on what she hoped to learn. Her Altadena home didn't burn but others nearby did. Soil testing revealed a high lead level of 110 ppm.

Citing an expert, Fang said chickens pecking in soil with high levels of lead and arsenic will accumulate the toxins in their bodies and eggshells. She advised people not to cook the eggs in their shells.

Others expressed similar anxieties about wanting to keep their loved ones – from pups to parents – safe. Yet attendees seemed to be able to reach beyond the current sorrow to connect with soil on a visceral level. After all, their passion for gardening predated the tragedy.

Diniega teared up recalling the first bee she saw in a seared Altadena neighborhood, about a month after the blaze was put out. Some trees in her garden whose roots survived are rebounding.

"It's a celebration anytime anything comes back," she said.



UM Rosenstiel School scientists and volunteer divers collect healthy coral from the Paradise Reef nursery to be outplanted in an adjacent reef during a Rescue A Reef coral restoration dive out of Diver's Paradise dive shop located at Crandon Marina in Key Biscayne, Florida, on Aug. 4.

D.A. Varela / Miami Herald / TNS

Best shot to save Florida reefs?

An industrial factory making heat-hardy babies

By DENISE HRUBY
Miami Herald (TNS)

MIAMI — When Andrew Baker looks out at the vacant lot next to his office on Virginia Key, he doesn't see the trees or grass that are there now. He sees a factory of the future. One story tall, roughly the size of half a football field. A high-efficiency production line designed not for electronics or auto parts – but for coral.

Such a facility would be unprecedented leap forward in reef restoration. Within four or five years, it could be up and running, as most of the necessary scientific foundation has already been developed and the work force is already being trained. With the help of automation, robots, and IVF-style breeding, it could produce hundreds of thousands of selectively bred specimens a year to help construct living reefs resistant to the rising temperatures killing off corals across the globe.

"These are some renderings," Baker, a marine biologist at the University of Miami, said, opening a design he created with AI. A sleek facility with dozens of water tanks, where almost every stage of coral life, from conception to adulthood, would be engineered and optimized.

A fully industrialized coral factory may sound far-fetched to some, but it might be the last hope for the world's reefs, including the 350-mile-long formation of brain, staghorn and fan coral that forms a natural sea wall off South Florida, Baker said. "We've done the science to show we can scale it up, but until we do it, we'll fail to meet the challenge of this global problem."

It would represent a major shift in approach, and a far more aggressive intervention than anything that's been done before. But since relentless heat waves and environmental assault have killed 9 in 10 coral since the 1970s and keep thwarting more traditional ways to restore reefs, some scientists believe anything less would amount to surrender.

"If we fail to take action at the scale that's needed to give Florida's coral reef an opportunity to survive climate change, then we're going to lose that ecosystem and it'll cease to be part of Florida's identity," Baker said. Also lost will be the billions of dollars coral reefs contribute to the local economy, from drawing tourism to fisheries and coastal protection from hurricanes.

Right now, nobody has stepped up to bankroll such an ambitious effort. But the Department of Defense and Florida's Department of Environmental Protection have already spent millions to support research on this type of next-generation reef-building, and Baker and other marine scientists believe private investments or taxpayer backing could make it a reality.

The techniques and technology are already proven. On a recent evening, in a lab at UM's Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric, and Earth Science along the Rickenbacker Causeway, one crucial step toward mass production of reef-building material was already under way: The breeding of a stock of climate-hardy corals.

Getting the product right

For a single coral to exist is nothing short of a lottery win. In the oceans, adult brain corals like the one in Baker's lab release bundles of both sperm and eggs that float to the surface, split apart, and drift on currents until they meet and fuse with a mate. If luck holds, the then free-floating embryo develops into a larvae, which settles on a reef and begins life as a coral polyp.

Given the vastness of the ocean and the microscopic size of coral sperm and eggs, the odds of making it are vanishingly small. To improve their chances, corals have learned to spawn in synchronized waves, with each species tuned to a specific phase of the moon – nature's shared calendar.

Despite this remarkable orchestration, even if a single polyp comes out of the hundreds of thousands of bundles a single coral can produce, it'd be considered an evolutionary success.

A floor above Baker's office, in a room the size of a large walk-in closet, the odds are far better – especially if PhD candidate Katherine Hardy and her colleagues lend a helping hand.

Inside four tanks, each about the size you might find at a dentist's office, temperature and salinity are carefully controlled to mimic the ocean. A handful of snails, shrimp, and fake moonlight add to create the perfect matrix – an illusion of nature, all created by marine biologists to get coral to release their precious bundles.

That recent night, the scientists joked that their playlist of romance-themed songs ranging from the Police's "Roxanne" to Frank Sinatra's "Fly me to the Moon" helped serenade the first brain coral into releasing a shy drizzle of white bundles that floated to the top of a funnel-shaped net. Other corals saw no need to pace themselves and followed much faster. It was a beautiful sight, like the spawning events in nature documentaries showing the magic and wonder of nature.

And yet the sight isn't entirely natural, not just because the corals are in tanks, but because some of them are nearly 900 miles from their home in Honduras, from a region where ocean temperatures are about 2 degrees higher than in southern Florida. That type of heat has killed all but the most battle-hardened survivors in Florida. Yet in Honduras, the corals are still thriving, Hardy explained as she carefully pulled out the nets and transferred the Honduran bundles into Pyrex containers.

Changing gears

Until now, the global strategy to save reefs has largely relied on growing fragments in nurseries and having divers painstakingly plant them back into the ocean. Each year, thousands of volunteers outplant tens of thousands of corals, only to watch restoration fall hopelessly behind the pace of destruction. On top of that, the newly planted coral are sourced from a rapidly shrinking genetic pool.

Without transitioning to cleaner energy, scientists give the world's reefs some 25 years before complete collapse. That'd be a devastating blow to Florida, where reefs have been protecting coastal cities like Miami by absorbing 97 percent of wave energy. Without corals, the US economy is expected to suffer an average of $1.8 billion in flood-related damages each year.

Matias J. Ocner / Miami Herald / TNS

Andrew Baker, a University of Miami professor of marine biology and ecology, holds brain corals at the University of Miami's experimental hatchery, part of the Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric, and Earth Science, on Aug. 21 in Miami.

By breeding Florida's hardened survivors with Honduran corals, the scientists hope to create offspring that will carry a new heat-resistant genetic armor for the climate battles ahead.

Once the spawning ends, the team turns off the music and takes the Pyrex containers into a room where the temperature is kept at around 82 degrees. Here, Hardy and her colleagues mix the Honduran and Floridian bundles, with sperm and eggs of each fertilizing the other.

"This is the first Flonduran brain coral ever produced," Baker commented. "It's a world first." Scientists call this process "assisted gene flow," a way to supercharge evolution.

During their 500 million years on the planet, coral proved that they're masters of adaptation. Whether facing global warming that turned large swaths of land into deserts or cooling that killed off the dinosaurs, coral evolved. They survived.

Those past periods of global changes in the planet's climate, no matter how dramatic, unfolded over millennia. Coral had thousands of generations to adapt and evolve. Today's heating, driven by fossil fuel emissions, is unfolding within just a few decades. Neither coral nor any other species are afforded the time to adapt.

That's why scientists are working to supercharge evolution. The Flonduran brain coral, they hope, might survive even as the temperatures off Florida's coast will more closely resemble those of continental Honduras.

Ramping up the coral production line

While newly crossbred corals were recently outplanted and are now being monitored to evaluate which combination should go into production, researchers are racing to get the assembly line ready to scale output.

The goal is to run at near year-round capacity, with different coral spawning at different times during the year, not just over the couple of months in summer when they'd all spawn naturally. That was unthinkable in the past, when sperm and eggs could only be collected during night dives or from fragments that had to be broken off a reef and placed in a lab shortly before they'd spawn.

In 2017, however, a group of European scientists described the first-ever successful protocol that allowed "coral husbandry," including by using special lights to mimic the sun and moon, and, effectively, trick coral into spawning outside the ocean.

Joana Figueiredo, a professor at Nova Southeastern University's Marine Larval Ecology and Recruitment Laboratory, immediately saw the potential. "It opened a lot of opportunities," said Figueiredo, who has a background in aquaculture.

Figueiredo, who also directs the National Coral Reef Institute, realized that coral could now be farmed in controlled environments – not dissimilar from the shrimp she'd worked with during her doctoral studies in Portugal. "And since we already had the tanks, all we needed was the lights."

The dozens of baby coral in Figueiredo's windowless lab on Dania Beach are now illuminated by cornflower blue light that mimics the sun at night and the moon in the middle of the day. With that, the researchers can trick the coral into spawning during the day, a more labor-friendly time to tend to their needs.

Already, the different coral at Nova Southeastern spawn thrice a year. That alone makes the entire operation more efficient: With staggered cycles, researchers can move coral at different stages of growth through the production line, tripling the output. "It's a much more cost effective use of space and equipment," Figueiredo said.

Printing coral

Automation promises to be the next key. A coral printer, Baker said, would be great.

Instead of ink or plastic, the printer would dispense a mix of hydrogel and coral larvae, placed at just the right distance to give each the necessary space to grow. That way, 1,000 larvae could grow on a tile not much larger than a coaster.

After about two months, a robot could break off each and place them onto larger tiles, where the coral would grow for another four to seven months, until they're sturdy enough to be taken to real reefs. "This kind of thing does happen in industrial manufacturing processes," Baker said.

Advanced printing technology also could potentially preempt the leading cause of coral death: starvation. When waters overheat, the microscopic algae living inside coral stop producing sugar – the coral's food source – and instead release toxins.

As the coral understands that it's being poisoned from within, it expels the algae in a desperate act of self-preservation, turning ghostly white in the process. The coral, now bleached, is alive, but slowly starving. Just like coral themselves, however, some algae are already more heat-resistant than others, and a printer could inject this superior algae in hydrogel alongside the coral larvae, ensuring that the best is available from the beginning.

Paying the bills

With her background in aquaculture, which produces more than half of the fish consumed globally, Nova Southeastern's Figueiredo sees the massive potential in the coral factory concept. Though the new approach will resemble factory farming, the potential benefits to humans are infinitely greater than an affordable salmon steak.

Private enterprise could grow the coral and plant them on artificial reefs, Figueiredo said – a nature-based barrier to protect from storm surge. Unlike a concrete wall, such as the 20-feet high one the Army Corps of Engineers had suggested, reefs also restore themselves. "I wouldn't see why that couldn't be done," she said of private-owned reefs.

Given that reeds can be seen as public infrastructure that can protect the entire coast, taxpayer funding is another option. The Department of Defense, for one, recognized the value. That's in part because of Hurricane Michael. In 2018, the Cat 5 destroyed or demolished 484 buildings at the Panhandle's Tyndall Air Force Base beyond repair. For the recovery, the DoD is spending an estimate of about $5 billion.

Compared to that, the $50 million the DoD granted to universities like UM to create artificial reefs populated with heat resistant coral and oysters was peanuts. An ounce of prevention is worth a cure, Baker said. "It might cost us millions of US dollars to have an industrial-scale center, but it will cost us billions in the future if we don't."

Whether publicly or privately funded, the numbers the researchers are talking about are staggering. The hundreds of thousands of corals that Baker envisions producing would simply cover the needs of Miami-Dade. Additional factories could be built to supply the Keys, Hawaii, the Bahamas, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

At Nova Southeastern, Figueiredo has already set up a program that trains the new work force that will be needed to staff and run them. So far, she's trained more than 50 people in setting up facilities to sexually propagate corals.

Some skeptics might argue that coral factories are only slightly more realistic than Baker's childhood fantasies of becoming a dinosaur. Baker, now salt-and-pepper-haired, disagrees. The technology is available, and the situation has long been dire enough to force extreme action. With the right investment, the first factory could be up-and-running in as little as four years.

The time is now, he said. "It's not sci-fi."

This climate report is funded by Florida International University, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the David and Christina Martin Family Foundation in partnership with Journalism Funding Partners. The Miami Herald retains editorial control of all content.

FINANCE

Dreamstime.com / TNS

Survey: Nearly 3 in 4 Americans have a financial regret

By LANE GILLESPIE
Bankrate.com (TNS)

Managing your personal finances can be complicated. Even for experts, refining a budget, paying off high-interest debt and saving for the future is a matter of trial and error. If you've ever made a financial mistake along your journey, know it's very common – 74 percent of Americans say they have a financial regret, according to Bankrate's new Financial Regrets Survey.

Although Americans are currently navigating a number of economic hurdles – including high tariffs, rising prices and sluggish hiring – the percentage of people who say they have a financial regret is actually down slightly from 77 percent in 2024.

"While a majority of Americans still admit to harboring some remorse over their past financial decisions, the decrease is a step in the right direction," Bankrate Financial Analyst Stephen Kates says.

Making financial mistakes and learning from them are all part of the journey towards financial health. If you've made a financial mistake, know you can learn from it and take steps towards recovery starting today.

Bankrate's insights on financial regrets

■ Regrets are down slightly, but are still rampant 74 percent of U.S. adults say they have a financial regret, down from 77 percent in 2024.

■ Many people are struggling to address their financial regrets 43 percent of U.S. adults with financial regrets haven't made any progress in the past 12 months, up from 40 percent in 2024.

■ More affordable essentials could make a difference in many people's financial situations 30 percent of U.S. adults say cheaper essentials (such as gas or groceries) would most likely improve their personal financial situation in the near future.

Fewer Gen Zers have financial regrets this year

Saving for retirement, keeping a well-stocked emergency fund and avoiding high-interest debt are some of the most important steps you can take for your financial health. Accordingly, Americans' top two financial regrets are not saving for retirement early enough (22 percent) or taking on too much credit card debt (15 percent).

Everyone saves for retirement at their own pace, but a good benchmark is to save the equivalent of one year's salary by the time you turn 30 and eventually have 10 times your salary at retirement age. However, as of the fourth quarter of 2024, the average 401(k) balance is only $131,700, and the average IRA balance is only $127,534, according to Fidelity. Assuming someone has both accounts, they would still have a lot of saving left to do to hit 10 times the average U.S. salary of $67,920. With so many Americans having a fraction of what they need to retire comfortably, it makes sense that so many would regret not saving for retirement earlier.

"A lack of early retirement preparation is still a major regret for many Americans, especially older Americans," Kates says.

Similarly, taking on too much credit card debt is common in part because of how easy it can be for credit card debt to spiral out of control. The average credit card balance is $6,371, according to TransUnion. If you were to carry a balance on your credit cards – as many people do – and only make the minimum payments at the average interest rate of 20.13 percent, you'd be in debt for more than 18 years and pay thousands more in interest. Avoiding carrying a balance on your cards is the best way you can keep from paying extra in interest.

Not saving enough for emergency expenses was the third-most common regret, but notably, the percentage has fallen since 2024 – from 18 percent in 2024 to 13 percent in 2025.

A small percentage of Americans cited taking on too much student loans debt (5 percent), not saving enough for their children's education (3 percent), buying more houses than they could afford (2 percent) or something else (15 percent).

Generation-wise, the percentage of Gen Zers who said they regretted not saving enough for an emergency fund dropped from 26 percent to 12 percent, a bigger drop than any other generation.

As Gen Zers struggle to balance their budgets amid high prices, student loan debt and unaffordable housing, they are also the likeliest generation to say they have no emergency savings, according to Bankrate's separate Emergency Savings Survey. What's more, Gen Zers are still young, and many may not have run into an expensive emergency yet. If they do, their attitudes toward saving for emergencies could change.

Additionally, 15 percent of women say not saving for emergency expenses is their financial regret, compared to 11 percent of men. Generally, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data analyzed by Bankrate, more women than men say they are facing high prices of everyday goods, and they tend to feel worse about the economy and their shot at the American dream overall (including goals such as homeownership, being able to retire or having a successful career).

Progress on financial regrets has stalled

Year-over-year, relatively few people have made progress on their financial regret.

Only 15 percent of people with a financial regret have made "significant" progress on it in the last 12 months, virtually unchanged from 2024, when 16 percent of people said the same. Similarly, 42 percent of people with a financial regret have made "some" progress on it in the last 12 months – 44 percent of people said the same in 2024.

Forty-three percent of people with a financial regret say they haven't made any progress on it in the last 12 months, as of 2025. In 2024, 40 percent said they hadn't made any progress on their financial regret.

"Our data show that while fewer Americans report having financial regrets, those who do are making less progress in addressing them," Kates says. "The same groups that saw the biggest declines in financial regrets, young Americans and those with the lowest incomes, are also reporting the least progress. This highlights the growing gap between those achieving their financial goals and those falling behind."

Progress on financial regrets, by generation and income

More younger Americans (Gen Zers and millennials) year-over-year say they haven't made any progress on their regret. Specifically, more than 1 in 3 (36 percent) of Gen Zers with a financial regret say they haven't made progress on it in the last 12 months, compared to 26 percent in 2024. Gen Xers and baby boomers with a financial regret were relatively unchanged year-over-year.

Percentage of Americans who haven't made progress on their financial regret, by year and generation:

Year	24	25
Gen Zers (ages 18-28)	26%	36%
Millennials (ages 29-44)	36%	47%
Gen Xers (ages 45-60)	46%	44%
Boomers (ages 61-79)	45%	43%

Source: Bankrate's Financial Regrets Survey, July 16-18, 2024 and July 9-11, 2025

Across income brackets, more than half (58 percent) of Americans with a financial regret who make under $40,000 say they haven't made progress on it, up from 50 percent in 2024:

Percentage of Americans who haven't made progress on their financial regret, by year and income level:

Year	24	25
Under $40,000	50%	58%
$40,000-$79,999	34%	39%
$80,000<	29%	24%

Source: Bankrate's Financial Regrets Survey, July 16-18, 2024 and July 9-11, 2025

Rising prices are taking a toll on personal finances

Over the past several years, rising prices have impacted Americans' mental health, affected how they save and even influenced how they voted in last year's presidential election. Now, 30 percent of Americans say cheaper essentials, such as gas and groceries, would likely improve their personal financial situation in the near future – more than any other factor suggested by Bankrate:

Fifteen percent of people say labor market-related factors would improve their personal financial situation. Specifically, 11 percent cite better job opportunities and 4 percent cite better job security. Americans are thinking about their work situation more as the Trump administration's higher tariffs and AI are coinciding with a narrower job market for white-collar workers. Also, employers are holding off hiring – U.S. employers added fewer jobs in July than expected, according to CNBC. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) also amended its figures to note that job growth in May and June was only a fraction of what it originally reported.

New graduates are having an especially difficult time looking for white-collar work, as some companies are replacing entry-level jobs with AI. Gen Zers are far less likely than older generations to say cheaper essentials would improve their personal financial situation. Instead, they tended to cite job opportunities and job security.

Other people say lower rent (10 percent) or rising stock market values (7 percent) would improve their personal financial situation. Only 6 percent of people each cite a drop in interest rates or income tax cuts.

"While a focus on jobs and rent skewed towards younger populations, the desire for lower-cost essentials spanned all ages and regions," Kates says.

By region and income level Across regions, people in the Midwest are most likely to say cheaper essentials would most likely improve their personal financial situation in the near future:

NORTHEAST: 25%
MIDWEST: 33%
SOUTH: 30%
WEST: 3%

Regardless of income level, the plurality of Americans say cheaper essentials would most likely improve their personal financial situation. On the other hand, people who make under $40,000 were likeliest to say lower rent would most likely improve their personal financial situation in the near future:

UNDER $40,000 PER YEAR: 17%
$40,000-$79,999 PER YEAR: 11%
$80,000 PER YEAR OR MORE: 3%

2 ways to tackle your financial regrets

Financial mistakes happen. If you made a money-related mistake in the past, it's likely you can still take steps today to recover – or at least make sure you don't make the same mistake again.

1. Meet with a financial advisor

Whether you want to make a budget or completely change how you invest, you don't need to navigate your financial recovery alone. Consider reaching out to a financial advisor near you. Financial advisors can help far beyond just managing assets, offering guidance on debt payoff strategies, budgeting, retirement planning, saving for you or your children's college education, estate planning and more. Plus, many local financial advisors don't have minimum asset requirements, meaning people of all income levels can seek out their services.

When choosing a financial advisor, it may be helpful to look into a few things first:

■ Identify what you're looking for ahead of time so you can take advantage of the advisor to the fullest extent. Do you want to become debt-free? Are you looking for someone to help you make retirement contributions? Consider bringing three big goals to your first appointment so you can see if the advisor is the right fit.

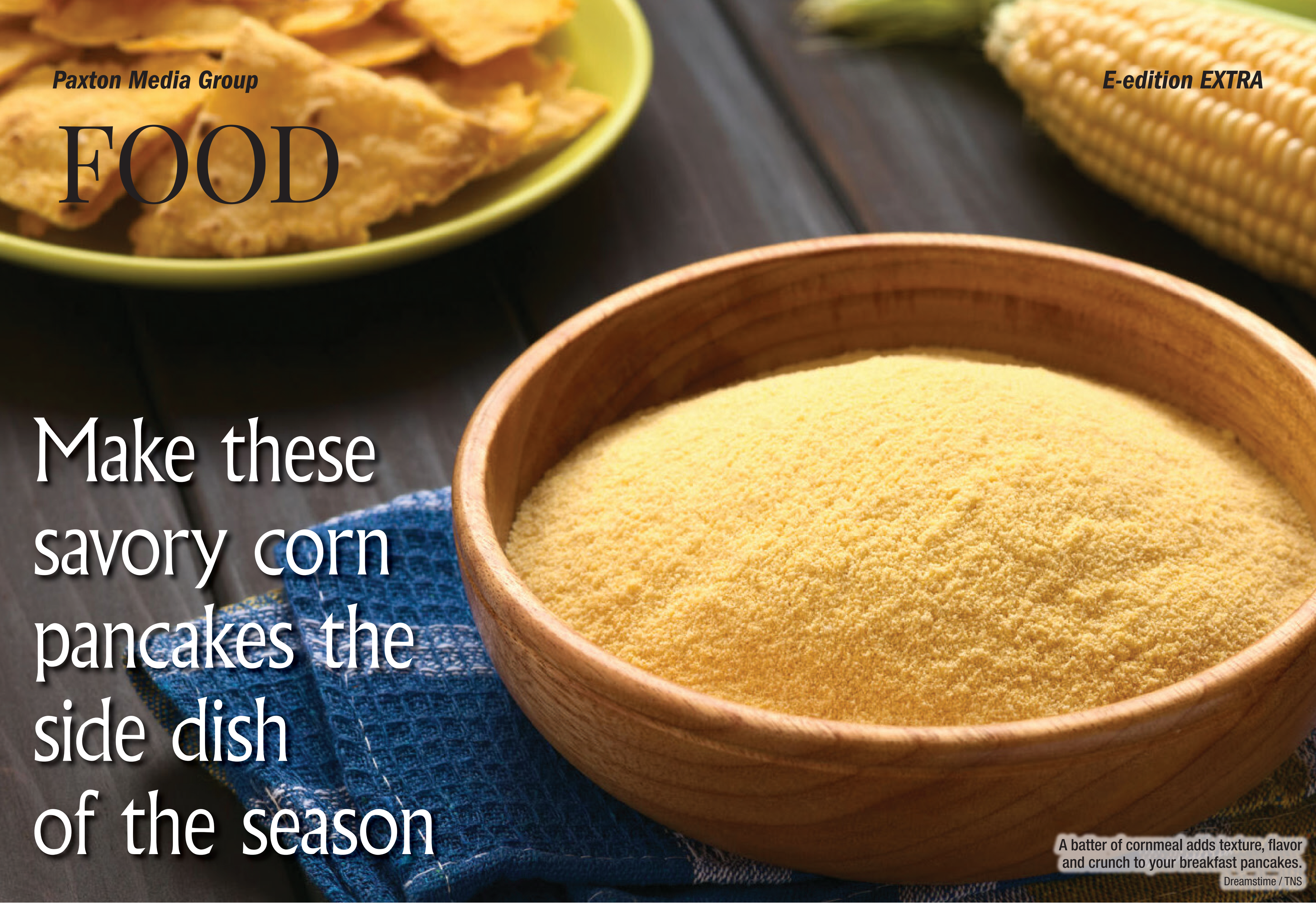
■ Make sure your advisor is a fiduciary – meaning they are legally required to act in the best interest of their clients. Also, you may want to prioritize a fee-only financial advisor, instead of someone who charges a portion of your assets under management. That's the more affordable option for most people.

■ Bring a list of questions to make sure they're the right fit. Make sure they understand your financial goals.

2. Brush up on your financial education

If you want to avoid having financial regrets in the future, you can learn more about personal finance through free online courses, which can teach you the basics of personal finance or dive into more complicated topics like retirement and investing.

Methodology All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,078 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 9th – 11th July, 2025. The survey was carried out online and meets rigorous quality standards. It gathered a non-probability-based sample and employed demographic quotas and weights to better align the survey sample with the broader U.S. population.



Make these savory corn pancakes the side dish of the season

A batter of cornmeal adds texture, flavor and crunch to your breakfast pancakes.
Dreamstime / TNS

By BETH DOOLEY
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Corn, sweet and tender, is in joyful high season. There's lots of it, and it's easy to find, easy to love!

The best way to eat corn is straight off the cob, dripping with butter and showered with coarse salt … or grilled to roasty, caramelized perfection and slathered with spicy lime mayo. But hurry, the season for corn is now. Enjoy it by the bushel before summer and corn fade into a hazy memory.

Make sure the corn is local and fresh. Look for plump, dark green husks that are heavy in the hand. This means the ear is mature and the kernels are the proper size. (Please don't peel back the husk to check the interior.)

In our home, we eat cob after cob, night after night, until sometime near mid-August, when we're ready for another approach. Corn and tomato salad? Creamed corn? Corn chowder? Succotash? Better yet, savory corn pancakes.

Studded with sweet corn kernels, garden herbs and a kick of chili crisp, these are not your breakfast pancakes. They're more like cornbread with a lovely crisp, crusty edge. The batter of cornmeal adds texture, flavor and crunch; browned butter adds a dark, nutty touch.

These are just as delicious with fresh raw corn cut straight from the cob as they are with leftover corn from last night's barbecue. Whether grilled or steamed, you'll want to use up that corn. You could also stir into the batter shredded Cheddar or Parmesan cheese, a little chopped ham or cooked bacon for heft. Top these with peppers and cherry tomatoes that have been roasted to turn jammy, tangy and sweet. Fresh tomato salsa and a dollop of sour cream also would be lovely.

Corn and tomatoes are the season's perfect partners. Served as a substantial side dish to roasted or grilled chicken or as a light dinner, this pair shines with summer's pizazz!

Savory Sweet Corn Pancakes with Jammy Tomatoes and Peppers

Makes 1 dozen 3-inch pancakes, serving about 4 to 6.

Studded with sweet, tender corn kernels and fragrant garden herbs, these pancakes are topped with jammy tomatoes and peppers for a taste of summer on a plate. You can make the batter several hours in advance, hold in a covered container in the refrigerator, and cook right before serving.

JAMMY TOMATOES AND PEPPERS:

- 1 pint cherry tomatoes
- 1 large red or orange bell pepper, cored and cut into 1/2-in. pieces
- 2 to 3 tbsp. olive oil
- Coarse salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Chopped basil

SWEET CORN PANCAKES:

- 1/4 c. (4 tbsp.) butter
- 1 c. fine yellow cornmeal
- 1 c. all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 1/4 c. buttermilk or whole milk yogurt
- 1 tsp. chili crisp, Sriracha or your favorite hot sauce
- 2 eggs
- 2 c. corn kernels, from about 2 ears corn
- 1/4 c. chopped parsley
- Oil for the skillet

To make the jammy tomatoes: Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. In a large bowl, toss the tomatoes and peppers with enough oil to generously coat. Spread out on a baking sheet in one layer. Season with salt and pepper. Roast until the tomatoes begin to split and the peppers become very tender. Remove, top with the chopped basil, and cover to keep warm.

To make the sweet corn pancakes: In a small saucepan or skillet, melt the butter over medium heat. Stir and watch as it becomes foamy, then begins to smell nutty, golden and starts to brown, about 4 to 5 minutes. Remove from the stove and set aside.

In a large bowl, stir together the cornmeal, flour, baking powder and salt. In a separate medium bowl, whisk together the browned butter, buttermilk, chili crisp and eggs. Fold this into the dry ingredients until no dry streaks of flour remain. Fold in the corn kernels and herbs.

Film a large skillet or griddle with a little oil and set over medium-high heat. Ladle about ¼ cup of the batter onto the griddle, spreading it out with a spatula, repeating with as many as you can fit onto the pan. Cook undisturbed until the edges of the pancakes begin to set and bubbles start to break the top surface, about 1 ½ to 2 ½ minutes. Carefully flip the pancakes with a thin, flexible spatula and cook on a second side until golden brown and set, about 2 minutes longer. Transfer to a wire rack and set in a rimmed baking sheet in a warm oven while you cook the remaining pancakes. Serve topped with the jammy tomatoes and peppers.

Steak fries are the worst, but these fat fries will make you a believer

By JENN HARRIS
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

LOS ANGELES — I will never understand the allure of the fat French fry. Steak fries are contemptible. Wedges of bland starch with no crunch, like a mouthful of molded mashed potatoes. There is no amount of ketchup, ranch or aioli that can save thick fries from the lower depths of tuber hell. Just order a baked potato and be done with it.

Curly fries, when done correctly, are crisp through each coil. I'm never mad at a waffle fry.

The skinny fry has the potential to be a spud revelation. It's texturally superior to a wedge, with a more even ratio of crunch to fluff. Three skinny fries clumped together and dunked into your favorite condiment will always hit. A single fat fry could never.

For a long time, I held the firm belief that Chateau Marmont was home to the greatest French fries in all the land. They're served in a decorative silver cylinder meant to elevate, at least via the presentation, the humblest of hamburger sidekicks. The mountain of fries exudes an air of luxury, threatening to spill from the top, showered in Parmesan cheese and smelling vaguely of truffles. Truffle Parmesan fries ($17) in the sceniest of scenery Los Angeles hotels? I can feel you seething as I type this. I can hear the guffaw of annoyance that just escaped your mouth. I know – people feel strongly about French fries.

After years of pawing through orders of fries at Heavy Handed, République and a handful of other places around town, I no longer believe they are the best fries in Los Angeles, but they continue to hover near the top, made even more enjoyable with an ice-cold martini. They are worth enduring the slight chill from the two hosts posted as gatekeepers to the bar and restaurant. I don't hold a SAG card, and my social media follower count is far lower than what is acceptable, but please permit me to pass, sit and overpay for your very good French fries.

Photos by Jenn Harris / Los Angeles Times / TNS

LEFT: The truffle Parmesan fries from Chateau Marmont previously believed by this author to be the greatest French fries in all the land. **RIGHT:** The Apennine fries from Rossoblu in downtown Los Angeles.

Also vying for the title of best French fries are the tallow fries from the new Happies Hand Made in the Arts District, named for the beef tallow the fries bathe in. They're long, golden sticks that resemble fine fingers – the sort of fries that appear to have a surface sheathed in an extra layer of speckled coating that provides a satisfying crunch with each bite. They're seasoned well with salt and pepper, well enough to skip the ketchup. But as our deputy Food editor Betty Hallock likes to say: It's not a French fry if you can't dip it in ketchup. Once again, people feel strongly about French fries and their condiments.

I recently stumbled on what could be the best French fry I've ever tasted at an Italian restaurant in the Arts District. It was like the world shifted into another universe where the thick fry crawled out of the depths of tuber hell and emerged triumphant.

If you never noticed fries on the Rossoblu menu, you'd be forgiven. Steve and Dina Samson's restaurant is known best for Steve's regional Italian cooking, built on his family's traditional Bolognese dishes, including stellar pasta. But if you read through to the bottom of the menu, you'll find the fries under the "contorni" or sides section, listed as "Apennine fries, triple-cooked, herbs, balsamic" ($14).

They're named for the fries Steve remembers eating as a kid in a small mountain village in the Apennines in southern Bologna.

"One time we just went to some outdoor restaurant and I had fries with balsamic vinegar, and it was like, 'Phew, this is mind blowing,'" he says. "I was probably like 10 years old, but it stuck in my mind and I always wanted to do that."

Steve's fries are shy of wedge territory, though I label anything wider than a quarter inch (about the width of a McDonald's fry) a fat fry. They're served in a heap in a bowl, the logs of potato annealed, shiny and splotched with balsamic vinegar. The surface of each fry resembles the rugged terrain of good fried chicken, jagged and almost shaggy in parts. Bits of fried rosemary and sage litter the top.

They're hot and crunchier than I expect for a fry with sizable girth, the exterior layer of potato as delicate and crisp as a chip. But it isn't just that outer layer that's crunchy. It's like the potatoes are fried from the inside out, with a crunch that permeates 90 percent of the fry's nearly hollow body and eventually relents to a fluffy core. There is no need to rummage around for a good one. They are all the good one.

Before you have time to process how mind-bogglingly excellent the fries are, you get a bite tinged with vinegar and your mouth is flooded with the sweet and sharp tang of balsamic.

With two bites, I became a fat fry believer. Or at the very least an Apennine fry believer.

After trying multiple varieties of potatoes, Steve settled on Kennebec potatoes, and only Kennebec potatoes, to make his fries.

"They haven't been consistently on our menu because it's been hard to keep them consistent," Steve says. "Sometimes our produce guy says it can be hard to get Kennebecs because In-N-Out uses so many of them. And then the way potatoes are farmed, it depends on the time of year and how long the potatoes have been stored."

And even if Steve secures the Kennebecs, he won't know a batch is good until he's gone through the three-cook process to make them.

The potatoes are cut, rinsed and soaked overnight. They're laid flat on racks, then steamed in the oven. The fries rest in the walk-in cooler and dry out, then take their first dip in the fryer. Once the fries are cooked through, they go back on a rack and into the freezer. The potatoes are flash-fried at 375 degrees to order.

"I've heard that there are ways to see if they float or see if they are going to be good potatoes," he says. "If you can figure out a way to tell before you go through all the work. But we haven't figured out a way to know before the third cook whether they are good or not. There have been times during service where we have a new batch, and it's like, uh-oh, we can't serve these."

Sometimes the potatoes absorb too much oil. Other times they fall apart in the fryer.

"Whenever we get a good batch of potatoes, it's such a good feeling," he says. "You feel like you've won something."

With the recent relaunch of the restaurant's menu and a steady supply of Kennebecs, the fries are on again at Rossoblu.

"Things like fries are the hardest to do well because there are a lot of variables and everybody knows what a good fry is," he says. "You can't fake your way around a good fry."

Though Steve intends to have the fries available whenever you visit, there are no guarantees. You may want to call ahead for the good fries.

Jenna Ortega, left, as Wednesday Addams and Lady Gaga as Rosaline Rotwood in "Wednesday."
Helen Sloan / Netflix / TNS

'Wednesday' creators explain Season 2's finale

By YVONNE VILLARREAL
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

[This article contains spoilers for the Season 2 finale of "Wednesday."]

LOS ANGELES — In a world where teenagers grapple with accusations of withering attention spans and a lack of motivation, Wednesday Addams managed to rouse from a coma and made the back-to-school scaries feel even more like a mind trip by ... summoning Lady Gaga?

"Wednesday" returned for the second half of its sophomore season on Netflix this week, picking up right after Part 1's ominous cliffhanger to reveal its moody teenage protagonist evaded potential death and that she was ready to dive back into the twisty world of deadly family secrets, monsterly situationships and friendship woes.

In the middle of the new threats and old mysteries are the show-stopping contributions from the pop superstar (and honorary mother to all outcasts, including her legion of Little Monsters, as her fan base is called). Lady Gaga, whose real name is Stefani Germanotta, made a roughly two-minute appearance as Rosaline Rotwood, a deceased professor at Nevermore, the school for outcasts that Wednesday (Jenna Ortega) attends, with second sight capabilities that trigger a Freaky Friday/body-swap interlude between Wednesday and her estranged friend Enid (Emma Myers). The multi-hyphenate artist also provides the song "The Dead Dance" to score what's poised to be another social media dance trend akin to Ortega's viral Season 1 moves to the Cramps' "Goo Goo Muck."

The Times spoke with creators and showrunners Al Gough and Miles Millar to break down the season. These are edited excerpts from the conversation.

Q: You know where we have to start: Lady Gaga. Tell me the origin story of this casting.

GOUGH: It all grew out of the viral dance from the first season. Some fan, who should collect a lot of money, put Lady Gaga's "Bloody Mary" [over the dance] – because it was "Goo Goo Muck" – and suddenly the dance became its own, whole new thing. We've always been huge Lady Gaga fans. And if there was anybody who was the ultimate outcast, it would be her. We just started a conversation with her and her team ... is there a way for her to be involved in Season 2? We found this character – because obviously, she's very busy and touring – that could be a small role, but it's an impactful one. Out of that grew "The Dead Dance," a song that she had which we heard a year ago and loved it. They're like, "She'll hold it for the show." And we were like, "Oh my God."

MILLAR: When we heard the lyrics, it was almost like she had written the song for the show. And we had this moment in Episode 7, which we'd always planned – we never wanted to repeat ourselves with Jenna doing a dance – but it feels like music and the show and dancing are integral now. To not scratch that itch creatively in Season 2, I think the audience would have been so disappointed. So it felt like, how do we honor the incredible Rave'N dance in Season 1, which became such an iconic moment, but do it in a way that's different and celebrate new characters? That's why we came up with the idea of the gala and seeing Agnes [Evie Templeton] and Enid come together. They've been antagonistic, and it felt like a beautiful moment of female friendship and blossoming and this incredible Gaga song was just like the icing on the cake.

Q: I was expecting a long courting process when you're trying to get Lady Gaga – like, writing letters.

GOUGH: The process wasn't fast, but it was always very pleasant and complimentary. Everybody wanted it to work. I think that's where we were starting from, is everybody wanted it to work.

Q: There's a lot of discussion right now about gaps between seasons, and obviously there were some factors that caused the gap here – namely the strikes, but also other projects. How do you feel about that, especially knowing the fan base skews younger? Is it harmful to maintaining that relationship with the material?

MILLAR: We certainly never wanted a three-year gap. I think the show feels like an event movie, in a weird way, so I think people are prepared to wait, but it's not ideal. It's something that we would never want ourselves, as viewers. It's been gratifying that people have come back in the way they have, and we definitely feel their love for the show, but we had obstacles in terms of getting to that place, coming back. No one's to blame. It's just the reality of the strike and everything else. Now the focus is coming back quicker. We rolled right from production into the writers' room; now we're rolling right into production [on Season 3 in October]. We're definitely on a faster cadence, and that's certainly the plan moving forward.

That said, as hopefully you see on screen, it is a huge show. We have over 3,500 visual effects shots. We're still finishing [the finale] this week. There are still shots that are going to be dropped in that monster fight on the roof, the fight in the clock tower. The most complex visual effects in the show actually is Professor Olaf, which is the Christopher Lloyd character. But that takes a lot of time and trial and error to get to the point where I think the show looks as good as it does. Certainly our imperative is to get the show back faster; I know Netflix has that goal and wish as well.

GOUGH: Our goal is we've got to create the best show we can create. As Miles said, it takes us a certain amount of time. When you get in your head like that, you can't actually do your best work. I can guarantee you that's something that the Netflix marketing department thinks about a lot. They certainly try to keep fans engaged online and through other ways. And the Netflix Houses now that have those [fan] experiences. Can you translate that and keep engagement? You're right, there's a lot of shows and movies out there and you want to be able to stay in the zeitgeist in that time when you're not in the zeitgeist. But for us, at a certain point, we just got to create the show, try to keep all the noise outside.

Q: In the space between Season 1 and 2, Jenna was pretty vocal about not connecting with the character choices from the first season. I'm curious how you felt as it happened? And what has "Wednesday" taught you about how to work with actors and how to consider their opinions or perspective about the material?

GOUGH: We're not going to speak to some of that because we've spoken to it in previous interviews, but I think our philosophy has always been – from "Smallville" on down "Into the Badlands" – it is a collaboration and a conversation with the actors. We always say movies is a party, but a television show is like a family. They have to feel ownership. We had that with Jenna in Season 1 – she read all the scripts, she gave notes. She's continued to do that in Season 2. She's taken a more active role in terms of being in production meetings and understanding the marketing perspective and just having all of that. She's a generational talent and she's going to have a very long career, and the career will be more than just acting. Actors are the keeper of the world and they have to be able to [understand] their characters. We'll take a good idea from anybody. You just want them to be engaged and to have good ideas and be thinking about their characters. It's something we learned from John Wells, who we met with very early on, before we started running "Smallville," to get his advice. That's what he told us. As a creator, you have to have the vision for the show, but you have to be open to these ideas and funnel them through.

Q: Is it fair to say you took some of it into consideration because there was less of an emphasis on a love triangle, at least with Wednesday? We really see things build in the friendship between Enid and Wednesday.

GOUGH: The thing is, if your first boyfriend turns out to be a monster, there was never going to be like, "Oh, I can't wait to dive back into a romance" idea. The show's been in our head for six years; it was always like, Season 2 was once bitten, twice shy, especially if you're Wednesday Addams – or once bitten, twice stabbed. That felt like the natural evolution. Again, she's not a character who was, even Season 1 [boy crazy] and it worked great. People were invested and intrigued and wanted to know. I can tell you from having daughters – because most times it's portrayed as the girls are loving for the boys. That's not true in every situation. With my two daughters, it's the boys who've been way more interested in the girls, and then they eventually come around or think, maybe I'll do it. If you look at Season 1, Xavier and Tyler were way more interested in Wednesday. Wednesday had no interest and any time she even delved into what you would see as romance – she went to the dance because she thought he was a suspect. Wednesday never does anything because she goes with the flow. She's either backed into a corner or it's going to help her in her larger case. Even in that love triangle, we never betrayed Wednesday. She was never starry-eyed for either boy.

MILLAR: That love triangle worked, actually, very well. It's the dramatic backbone of the season and leads Wednesday – because I think Wednesday, as we like to say, is often wrong; she is someone who just is very headstrong, and I think that's what makes her so intriguing, that she's complex and flawed. That's an interesting thing for teenage female protagonist, who often aren't that. It's the journey of a teen; with Season 2, we can change it, and Jenna was in an agreement with that. It's been a very successful partnership in terms of the steering the course of the character, and where she goes and how she behaves and what she says.

Q: What were you interested in exploring between the Enid-Wednesday dynamic in Season 2? And how did you arrive at the body-swapping idea?

GOUGH: The end of Season 1, Wednesday made a friend, but then it's like, OK, how do you be a friend? That's something that she is still very Wednesday [about] and she still has her preconceived notions of Enid, which is, "I can't tell her the secret, I have to save her. I can't include her – she's weak, she'll lose her mind." She doesn't think that Enid can handle it, so she doesn't really see her friend. With Enid, it's even the case with Ajax, and moving on to Bruno, which is Ajax saw her one way, and she's not that girl anymore.

The body-swap episode was a way to explore that so that they could see [what it's like] literally walking a mile in somebody else's shoes – in this case, their bodies – and seeing what it is that they appreciate about each other. It's an idea that's sitting there – they're so polar opposites and they're both such good actors that they've created characters with such specific quirks and body movement and cadences and things like that. To then put the one in the other, it just felt like, why wouldn't we do that?

MILLAR: We've had moments of real darkness this season; we just need to have an episode where the audience is going to have the best time and it be a great ride. I remember we were on set and it was the moment where Enid wakes up in [Wednesday's] body and starts screaming. Jenna can scream nonstop. She was screaming all day, but it was so incredible to hear. You didn't know who it was really. It was complete transformation. It was definitely a challenge. It was more than halfway through the season, they were tired and it was a real testament to their resilience and professionalism that they really just went for it.

GOUGH: They would record each other doing the line so that they could hear. They studied like two A students. They really put everything into it.

Q: You brought the Addams family further into the fold this season, particularly giving attention the mother-daughter dynamic between Morticia and Wednesday – their parallels, their tension.

GOUGH: The show's a comedy, it's a satire, but it always comes down to [being] a family drama. Season 1 even went back Wednesday's ancestor, Goody vs. Crackstone; then it was Gomez and Morticia vs. the Gates family. It all comes down to family secrets in this show. We wanted to expand that. The feedback we also got was people love the Addams Family and they're intrigued by them because there's no real mythology for the Addams Family. They didn't have names until the TV show in the '60s. Then you got a couple movies in the '90s. People love them, but you don't know much about them. For us, it's great because it's the opposite of "Smallville." It is a clean slate where you can build the family tree. And we do it with the blessing of Kevin Miserocchi, who runs the Addams Foundation.

You got a taste of it in Season 1, with Morticia and Wednesday, and then you saw it in the Parents' Weekend episode. But then the idea of Morticia is here, and what does that do? And the idea of this mother-daughter relationship, which especially in the teenage years, can be very fraught. They're a lot more alike than they want to admit, on both ends. To take that very universal idea and relationship that a lot of people have experienced, but put it through the prism of the Addams Family with Morticia and Wednesday, and they solve their fights with swords and there's more life-and-death sort of circumstances – that felt like a fun way to do it and a way to open up the show.

MILLAR: We really wanted to give Jenna some relief as well; she was in every scene of Season 1. It was a creative opportunity for us to explore different characters and to really expand the world of the show.

Q: I loved getting an origin story for Thing.

MILLAR: The first thing you see of Slurp is this gloved hand coming out of the ground. We thought, "Oh, everyone's going to know immediately; it'll be the worst kept secret in Hollywood." It's been really gratifying because that's such a great twist, if we could pull it off – it's right in front of your face the whole time.

We talked about [whether Thing] should be attached to someone who is so evil. Obviously, he's flawed. He's often doing things for the right reasons; they're sort of deranged reasons. But Isaac Night [Owen Painter] is a flawed character, but he's also the noble genius as well. That was a debate. We had some other options we explored and went down the road with, but ultimately we thought it was this idea of transformation of seeing a zombie who then becomes human and the comic foil of Pugsley [Isaac Ordonez] choosing him like a pet dog, and then he starts eating brains – it just sounds so insane, but actually it make sense in the show.

Q: Now I want to know the path you didn't take with him.

MILLAR: We had a whole backstory for him, which is he was in a circus and he fell in love with a circus performer. It was a very much more sweet story, rather than this one, which is much more macabre, sort of inspired by Frankenstein, zombie movies.

Q: What can you tease about Season 3? Will there be more Lady Gaga? Things ends with Enid being seemingly trapped in wolf mode and there's Wednesday's psychic vision of Ophelia, Morticia's sister.

MILLAR: We're in the middle of [writing] Season 3 now. Our lips are sealed. We can't say anything, but obviously the end of Season 2 does set up that Ophelia will be coming to feature in Season 3. We'll say that much.

Q: By this time next year, will we have a Season 3?

GOUGH: I can't say anything to that.

MOVIE REVIEW

Giles Keyte / Warner Bros. Pictures / TNS

Patrick Wilson, left, as Ed Warren and Vera Farmiga as Lorraine Warren in "The Conjuring: Last Rites."

'The Conjuring: Last Rites' a dour send-off for Warrens

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

This fourth "The Conjuring" movie claims to be "Last Rites," and let's hope that's a promise. While it's highly likely the wildly successful Conjuring Cinematic Universe itself will continue, whether that's with a scary nun, creepy doll or some other cursed object, the story of Ed and Lorraine Warren has been thoroughly wrung dry at this point, and there's no juice left to squeeze from this carcass, as demonstrated in the dirge that is "The Conjuring: Last Rites."

Credit where it's due: this horror franchise has turned in some spectacularly scary and entertaining horror films, anchored by performances from Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga as the real-life married paranormal investigators the Warrens. Thanks to their presence, these films have been the best of "The Conjuring" series, exploring themes of vision and faith, seeing as believing when it comes to both God and the devil. These films have also offered portrayals of the Warrens that skirt any of their personal controversies, presenting them as blissfully married, heroic figures. On-screen text might claim that they were polarizing figures, but the films itself never engage with the real-life scandals.

The first two films, directed by James Wan, ingeniously engaged with the many themes of vision that these films tackle: physically, psychically and through a camera's lens. Bravura cinematography aligned the audience point of view with Lorraine's terrifying otherworldly visions of hauntings, possessions and demonic presence. Michael Chaves, who directed the spinoff "The Nun II" and "The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It," has mostly upheld these franchise requirements, though his approach is more bombastic than Wan's elegant style.

Chaves is once again behind the camera for "The Conjuring: Last Rites," with a script by Ian B. Goldberg, Richard Naing and David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick that promises to deliver a final Warren case that devastated the family and ended their careers on a dark note. Instead, "Last Rites" is merely a sluggishly routine send-off for the Warren family.

'The Conjuring: Last Rites'

★★

MPA rating: R (for bloody/violent content and terror)

Running time: 2:15

How to watch: In theaters

If you've seen a "Conjuring" movie, you'll know what to expect, and "Last Rites" doesn't break with formula. While the film starts in 1964 with the harrowing birth of the Warren's beloved daughter Judy, the plot largely takes place in 1986, wherein the misbegotten Smurl family from West Pittstown, Pennsylvania, has gotten themselves haunted thanks to an antique mirror adorned with three carved wooden baby heads, picked up from a swap meet. After a series of unfortunate events with things that go bump in the night, and increasingly violent visitations causing a media frenzy, the Warrens eventually manage to turn up to rid the house of creepy crawlies.

This time there's the added complication of the Warren's daughter Judy (Mia Tomlinson), who is about to get married, but she just can't shake those pesky psychic visions she inherited from her mother. She's the one who ventures to the Smurl household first, and her parents, who had been hoping to hang up their ghost-hunting spurs, reluctantly join her for one last ride. Ax-swinging ghouls, terrifying baby dolls and demonic possession ensue.

Chaves isn't so interested in making psychic vision manifest via a film camera – that's been done before anyway. Ed Warren even leaves his own cameras at home, uninterested in documenting the Smurl haunting. In "Last Rites," the thematic metaphor for seeing is the mirror itself, suggesting that we need to look at the darkest, most terrifying parts of ourselves, and not shut it out. Lorraine has tried to protect her girl from the life she has led, facing down the most terrifying demons, ghosts and spooks, but she can't stop Judy's destiny, and the only way out is to not look away.

"Last Rites" extends the next generation idea by incorporating Judy's fiance, Tony (Ben Hardy), as a new member of the family business. His function in the story is a bit awkward and random, but required for the Warren story to end on a high note (that opening bit about the family devastation never seems to come to pass).

The heart of these movies has always been Wilson and Farmiga, and without them, this franchise wouldn't be worth it. With this fourth movie, the Warren lore has been so thoroughly picked over, the tropes and rhythms now so ingrained, the jump scares routine at best. With the dour drudgery of "Last Rites," it has never been more clear that it's time to move on from their story, even as the memories of better installments linger.

SERIES REVIEW

'The Paper' is a spot-on commentary about the sad state of journalism

By ROBERT LLOYD and LORRAINE ALI
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

"The Paper" on Peacock is a belated spinoff of "The Office," much as Peacock is a sort of spinoff of NBC, where the former show aired on Thursdays from 2005 to 2013. In the new series, Dunder Mifflin, the office in "The Office," has been absorbed into a company called Enervate, which deals in office supplies, janitorial paper and local newspapers, "in order of quality." The newspaper at hand is the Toledo Truth Teller, sharing space with the toilet paper division.

Created by "Office" developer Greg Daniels with Michael Koman, "The Paper" is shot in the same documentary style, ostensibly by the same fictional crew, and imports "Office" player Oscar Núñez as head accountant Oscar Martinez, not at all happy to be back on camera.

In the first episode, Ned Sampson (Domhnall Gleeson), a starry-eyed journalism school graduate turned cardboard salesman turned toilet paper salesman, arrives as the new editor in chief of the Truth Teller, not exactly taking charge of a staff that consists entirely of narcissistic interim managing editor Esmeralda Grand (Sabrina Impacciatore), whose sole prior media experience is as a contestant on a dating reality show called "Married at First Sight"; ad salesman Detrick Moore (Melvin Gregg); subscriptions person Nicole Lee (Ramona Young); compositor Mare Pritti (Chelsea Frei), who wrote for "Stars and Stripes"; accountants Adam Cooper (Alex Edelman) and Adelola Olofin (Gbemisola Ikumelo); and Duane Shepard Sr. as Barry Stokes, the only official reporter, whose beat consists of high school sports and falling asleep. In the sitcom logic of the show, they will all be drafted as volunteer journalists, joined by Travis Bienlien (Eric Rahill), from the toilet paper division.

'The Paper'

Rating: TV-14

How to watch: On Peacock

Times television critic Robert Lloyd and news and culture (and former television) critic Lorraine Ali have worked in many newspaper and magazine offices between them, and come together here to discuss how "The Paper" compares to "The Office," its journalistic veracity and whether or not it's funny.

ALI: I'll start with my favorite quote about journalism from "The Paper": "The industry is collapsing like an old smoker's lung." Hack, hack, cough, I say from inside the beast. This half-hour comedy offered so many great moments of spot-on commentary about the state of legacy journalism that I wasn't sure if I should weep or laugh. I chose the latter, most of the time. The first couple episodes are clever, funny and charmingly clumsy – if not too close to the bone for folks like us. I'll get to the rest of the series in a minute, but how did the satire about a contracting newsroom strike you, Robert?

LLOYD: There are a couple of moments in the pilot episode where it flashes back to an old black-and-white documentary on the Truth Teller in an earlier age when 1,000 people worked for the paper, before the internet destroyed print journalism and the newspaper, which once occupied a whole building, and was eventually reduced to sharing a corner of a floor with the toilet paper division. It gave me a little shock. I feel like I caught the end of that analog era, at the L.A. Weekly, when it was a thin, then a fat alternative paper, and the Herald Examiner, where there were typewriters that must have been sitting there since the '30s, a sort of piratical "Front Page" energy and tons of talent. (Much of which migrated to The Times when the Herald folded.)

Aaron Epstein / Peacock / TNS

Ramona Young as Nicole in "The Paper."

ALI: I felt a tinge of sadness and loss watching those flashback scenes. Then they cut to present day, and the marbled halls of the once-great Truth Teller newspaper are empty. What struck me is how much the fictional paper's lobby looked like the old Globe Lobby of the L.A. Times' building downtown. I also got a lump in my throat when they went down into the basement where the old giant presses sat frozen. We had those relics in the old Times building too. For readers who don't know, the L.A. Times hasn't been in that landmark building since 2018. We're now in El Segundo. Sounds like a great setup for a sitcom joke, right?

LLOYD: Most – all? – newspapers have felt the stress of shrinking staffs and resources, of doing more with less. But the Truth Teller starts with almost nothing – that it comes out at all, apparently daily, is something of a joke in itself; at least Ted Baxter was the only knucklehead working at WJM on "Mary Tyler Moore," but there are more than a few of them here. "The Office" wasn't about the work, but about surviving the environment. It didn't really matter what did or didn't get done. But this is a show about a business – a noble institution, however ignobly served – with deadlines, some of which one would rightly regard as impossible, having met hundreds, if not thousands, in one's life – even without a skeleton crew that has no idea what it's doing. But it just sort of wishes them away. Then again, it is a sitcom.

The jokes are well-timed and reliably funny, but like "The Office," it's all down to the characters, which are wonderful company. Oscar, of course, we already know and love. But I especially liked Gregg as the soft-edged Detrick, with an awkward crush on the wry Nicole. Ned, whom the Irish Gleeson plays like someone out of a Frank Capra pastiche, can be a little competitive, but he's no Michael Scott; neither is he exactly Jim to Mare's Pam, though obviously they occupy a similar position, being relatively normal and attractive. But as the One Who Needs to Be Noticed, Impacciatore's Esmeralda does have more than a little Michael Scott in her, though turned up to 11, insanely glamorized and in an Italian accent. It's a hilarious performance. Her delighted scrolling through a thicket of ads on a clickbait article on a tip Brad Pitt left someone is a little comic gem. It's not unlike the way Janelle James pops out as Ava on "Abbott Elementary."

ALI: It's impossible not to compare "The Paper" to "The Office." It's unfair yet inevitable, and "The Office" wins, though my favorite version of that show was the British version with Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. But I do like what Gleeson does in "The Paper" with Ned Sampson, portraying him as an enthusiastic editor in chief born about 50 years too late to experience the Woodward and Bernstein glory days of print journalism. The deflated expression on his face is priceless when he advises his lost "reporters" to rely on the Five Ws of reporting, and one asks, "Is that a gang?" Gleeson has an impressive range. He was haunting as the conflicted foodie/serial killer in psychological thriller " The Patient," where he co-starred, ironically, with Steve Carell. I also really like Young as Nicole, who I admittedly had an affinity for as a drama club nerd in " Never Have I Ever."

My issue with "The Paper" isn't the cast, but the pacing. It starts off strong. The first two episodes are filled with sharp writing and build a strong foundation for what we expect to see: the hilarity of an inexperienced, underdog staff turning a local rag into a real source of news. But the momentum doesn't quite sustain. I felt myself losing interest in the story as the series progressed because their ensuing assignments, setbacks and interpersonal trajectories weren't all that compelling.

I do, however, appreciate that "The Paper," like "Abbott Elementary," mines the tragic humor of a crumbling American institution while also pointing out that this thing is happening under our noses, and shouldn't we do something – anything – to save it? Turning that tragedy into a sitcom is one answer.

Debbie Harry on how doing the 'wrong' thing motivates new Blondie album and fashion line

By KATERINA PORTELA
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Dia Dipasupil / Getty Images / TNS

Debbie Harry attends the 2025 Planned Parenthood New York Gala at Cipriani South Street on April 24 in New York City.

LOS ANGELES — When you're talking about Blondie frontwoman and style icon Debbie Harry, nothing is predictable. She appeared at our interview with opaque cat eye sunglasses and her signature shag haircut stylishly mussed. The smirk on her lips told me that our conversation would be memorable.

Decades before, she crashed onto the rock 'n' roll scene with new wave and genre-bending band Blondie in 1970s New York City. It wasn't without work and a lot of risk-taking – throughout her career, Harry has not been wanting to shy away from risks. From being the first musician to rap in a No. 1 Billboard song to pursuing a solo career and an acting career post-Blondie break-up, following her creative instinct is something that comes naturally.

"The seeds of creativity aren't really just numbers and letters. It's a lot more. It has to do with us. It has to do with soul," Harry said.

Most recently, the fashion icon released a line of clothing inspired by her lifelong punk aesthetics and androgynous style. In collaboration with Oregon-based brand Wildfang, her most recent foray into fashion is indicative of one thing: Debbie Harry is still hungry to do more.

As Blondie gears up for its most recent album produced by John Congleton of St. Vincent, set to release early next year, Harry sat down for a conversation on her influential style in her new fashion line, how AI has nothing on her, doing the "wrong" thing and how that "old search for soul" is motivating her as she steps into the studio once again.

[This interview has been edited for length and clarity.]

Q: I noticed in researching your career that there's just so much reinvention. You've constantly reinvented yourself from a harmony singer to a lead singer in a band to soloist to an actress to band member again and now as a fashion collaborator. What do you think pushes you to constantly reinvent yourself and pursue new creative passions?

A: There are some things that I absolutely loved, but I didn't take the chance. … At this stage in the game, I have to follow my rules. And I think for a young woman or a young girl to find that out about herself, it creates an awareness of who you are and your personality. And that's sort of what young people do. They look for themselves, they look for who they are. And fashion can be a big part of that.

Q: What would you describe as your style philosophy?

A: I think comfort. I want to put on what I'm going to wear and I want to feel right in it, and then I don't want to have to think about it. I don't want to have to be walking around the room making sure that my seams are straight, or my sleeves are right; I just want to have it on. I want to look great and I want to be comfortable in it.

For Wildfang, I got introduced to them through suits, and you know, I've always worn suits, like little boy things, and they're fun. I think fun is an important thing to embody in what you do, that and some kind of silliness or fearlessness, that's what turns people on, so I'm all for that. I've been doing it for so long, but I encourage younger artists to break the rules.

Q: Something that I really love about your style is this very DIY approach to fashion that you've always had. Especially with the infamous zebra print pillowcase dress and other looks where you seem to tear things up and put different pieces together. How does this DIY approach translate for you today?

A: Sometimes when you start out, you have to experiment. And I'm really in favor of that. I think experimentation is the key to success, and that's always been that way for me. I was sort of lucky in not having many options when I started and I did things that were wrong. They weren't really styles at the time. They weren't appropriate for the era. But doing things that you feel strongly about, coupled with the workability of a piece of clothing, even if it's wrong, it could be right for you. So, I always tell people not to be afraid to do something that might be considered wrong.

I think that sort of applies to, as you were saying earlier, do it yourself, like taking that zebra striped pillowcase and making a hot little number out of it was the right thing. I don't know, it just worked for me. I don't know if everybody wants to be that individualistic. So that's why finding a line of clothes that fits you right and suits your activities and your frame of mind, your mood, it's all very, very personal, very important.

Q: I wanted to talk about your new album. I'm really excited to hear it. I listened to "Pollinator," and I really loved this very fresh, almost rebellious sound that permeated the music. How would you describe the essence of your upcoming album?

A: I think our tradition has always been to cover a lot of different styles and to embody some different moods. So in that respect, it's a very traditional Blondie album. I think the thing that makes people carry on with us is that we're excited about what we do, and we work hard at it, and it's not sort of like, oh, well, I guess let's do [an album]. We write songs. We write stuff that's about our lives and about today.

I know for a fact that when I write a song with Chris [Stein], he usually comes in with a demo of the track. And then, this has happened from Day 1. I would say, "Chris, what are you thinking when you're writing this music? What's going through your head? Are you saying any particular phrase? Are you thinking of a particular word? Were you thinking about a special evening or a special event, a special movie?"

It's very easy for him to come up with a definition in words. Many times, that would be a jumping-off point for me, with like "Heart of Glass" or "Dreaming." More recently, we have a song on the new album called "A Man with No Face." And so I asked him, "What was that root? What was your mantra? What were you thinking of?" And very often that led me in a really good direction.

Q: So did he lead a lot of the writing, or was this a joint collaboration between the band for the album?

A: Yes, well, we had a lot of contributors. Glen Matlock [original Sex Pistols bassist] started playing bass with us a little while ago, and he contributed a song that is so terrific. It's just a wonderful song, and it really sticks in your head. It reminds me of his contribution to the Sex Pistols; it has that feel to it. It's a great, simple, three-chord, four-chord song with a great feel. It's on the album, and it's called "Sleepwalking."

There's also some really great dance music [in the album]. It's very rock and roll, but yet, we've always managed to squeeze in elements of other sounds in music and other styles of music, other moods of music. And Blondie has always done that. We've always embodied the present. So it feels like Blondie.

Q: That genre-blending is obviously a recurring theme in Blondie's music. Between having the first [Billboard] No. 1 rap song to the reggae influences and playing around with styles in general, I notice that you never really let genre limit you. What are your thoughts on breaking the barrier of genre and not staying within a musical box?

A: I think that there was a time when it wasn't done, and I think that was back in the '70s. It's quite a few years ago when the styles weren't blended. If you did a reggae album, you did a reggae album, and if you did a rock album, you did a rock album. But then we started mixing in influences because we were so urban. These were the influences that were around us [in New York City], and it just seemed normal; I don't know how else to explain it. These were the things that we liked.

We liked Donna Summer, we liked Giorgio Moroder. We liked all these different varieties of sounds and styles. And it just fed into what we were doing. We were at a time, fortunately, where we went from analog to digital, and it made so many more things possible that everybody today is really used to all the things that I'm saying, because that's what's done. This is what it's all about. But there was a time when it was about discovery.

It goes along with my ideas about what I was saying about fashion, discovering what you are, who you are and what you want to look like. It sort of applies to what we did with music. We had feelings about rap. We had feelings about reggae. We had feelings about dance music and club music. It was part of our underpinnings, so to speak. And so therefore it became obvious in the music when the music sort of transcended just a basic rock four-by-four.

The world has become a much smaller place because of digital communications and the improvement in communication. If only that communication went beyond the arts and so that we had this understanding in other aspects. I mean, we have intercultural understandings in food and fashion and music and art, and we should have it in every phase of our lives.

Q: How do you think Blondie as a band and as a collaboration between artists is growing and changing over the years?

A: Well, one thing I know is practice. "Practice and you get to Carnegie Hall" is the old saying. But, when you keep playing, you just get better and better at what you do. And I think that applies to anything, like writing. I mean, the more that you've written, the better you become at it, and then the easier it is for you to say things that resonate within you, and that take place in your life and your observation of life.

And we're lucky [to have new technology] now, because the brain works very quickly. We see things and we can change things very instantly. Nowadays, you can actually make your thoughts fact just as easily. And so I think it serves us well.

I remember when cassettes became a threat to vinyl. And how the guys from the record companies were all sort of going, "Oh my God, anybody can copy an album and make it into a cassette, and then they don't have to buy the album!" So we weathered that storm, and then cassettes went to CDs or 8-tracks, and it's sort of the same thing now when we're looking at AI. So everybody's saying, "Oh my god, AI! What will we do?"

Well, AI is much more comprehensive than any of those transitions. And I have seen AI-generated pictures of me, and I look at them and I just say, "Oh, well, that's AI, that's not me." I can tell. So, I think people are worried about it, and I don't know how much time anyone should worry. The seeds of creativity aren't really just numbers and letters. It's a lot more. It has to do with us. It has to do with soul. And, bring back that old search for soul. That's something that was very obvious in the 1960s, to make something with soul. And basically that's what the contrast with AI is. I've been played songs that were built on an algorithm, and I found them kind of boring.

Q: So you're personally not worried about AI. You feel like it's not a threat to musicians, because music needs soul?

A: That would be my preference. But I think that somewhere, somehow along the line, somebody will come up with an AI piece of music or artwork that is stunning.

I think if you do stuff that's mistakes or wrong, that becomes the best art of all. I can remember, when I was in school, centuries ago, that we'd go down and we'd buy these little 45s. Very often, the B-side would have mistakes, they would never have been pressed or released in today's world, but something about mistakes that lead to a "Oh well, maybe we can use that?" moment, and it just grows from there.

Q: I read this really beautiful interview that you did with Gaga 10 years ago, and in it, she was expressing how much you inspired her and how much seeing a lead female musician made a big difference for her in her career. How is that for you to see your impact on younger artists and see them taking some nods from you in their work?

A: It's great. I mean, we did the same thing, we all do that, we absorb what's around us. I don't think that I want to take eight bars of so and so's song and throw them into mine, but the impetus, or the feeling of their song, triggered something in me. Sometimes if I go to a live show, I'll come out with maybe just a beat that they're playing that I've really liked, and that will inspire a bit of a lyric. This creates this sort of a mantra-like effect, where you're just feeling that thing, and then a phrase comes to your head and your mind because of something that happened to you that day or that week. And it's like puzzle pieces. It's really fun. It's really fascinating.

But no matter what was your inspiration, you are going to describe something only like the way you would do it. And that's what the value is for me.

Q: Is there something that you're excited for in this new stage of your career, and something that you're looking forward to?

A: Well, I'm excited for the album to come out. ["Am I releasing the title?" she asks her manager beside her.] Okay, we're calling it "High Noon." And it's very funny. I was just playing one of my old songs, very old songs, and I actually used that name, "High Noon," in a lyric. So there is a continuity with the way that we think and the way that we lead our lives. And it's very important. And it's a building block kind of thing. It's Legos. That's right, our life is nothing but Legos.

Q: I was really curious, was there ever a pivotal moment in your career that really impacted the way that you approach music or approach creative pursuits?

A: Well, I don't know if there was any one extreme, pivotal moment, but I think working in an ensemble situation was a really, really valuable lesson. I think when you're in the recording studio, it's very intense and very focused. It's like when you catch someone on a candid camera, like a candid film or video; it's very revealing.

Being in the studio like that, I think that a pivotal moment for me was to not be afraid of that, to not hold on to my idea for fear that anything else would be terrible, but sort of see it as building blocks. I think that's what art is about, it's something that actually grows, it's almost like it's another level of being. It's about consciousness, I suppose. Embodying all the stuff that's around you that you can't really escape. You can escape it if you isolate yourself, and make yourself stick to something because that's what you know, but I think that searching and trying to express yourself is art.

Andy Warhol, when he started out, was so criticized in the art scene for using print work instead of doing everything by hand. Using that medium, he was really heavily criticized for that. In today's world, it's nothing, it's normal. He took a chance and did something that's "wrong," but absolutely right. I love that idea. Especially coming out of the "punk thing," that little era, that little moment, that little glitch in time, when you had people like the Talking Heads doing what we were doing, I think that was a breakthrough.

But even Gaga, with the way that she "pounds" music out, I think at one time that would've been considered "wrong." The way that she is a pianist, and she will stand up and play with her knee, that kind of stuff. And, well, Little Richard did that too, and Elton John, and these are expressions of passion. That's the complete value, is passion.

Q: Is passion what motivates you to continue making music, or what would you say is your motivation?

A: I have to feel right about it; it has to feel like an automatic thing. I'm very fortunate that I'm very musical, that I like hearing music. I like odd chord changes; when I was singing with the Jazz Passengers, that was sort of like going to college for me, they used all kinds of time signatures and harmonics and things. That was really exciting for me. And, I don't know, I'm just very lucky, I guess. I'm lucky I get to enjoy oddities in my life. I'm going to keep creating until I can't anymore.

"The Wizard of Oz," as presented in the Las Vegas venue Sphere on Aug. 28.
Rich Fury / Sphere Entertainment / TNS

'Wizard of Oz' at Las Vegas' Sphere feels more like a ride than a movie

By AMY NICHOLSON
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

"The Wizard of Oz" is certainly the right movie to face the great and powerful ambitions of Sphere, the most expensive entertainment venue in Las Vegas history. Since 1939, the treasured classic has hailed the awe of gazing into a glowing globe, whether it's glinting atop a fortune teller's table, transporting the meddlesome Glinda the Good Witch or spying on a teenage girl and her companions like a sinister security camera.

Special effects are central both to "Oz's" appeal and its plot: The big reveal is that technicians, not wizards, pull the levers that make an audience gasp. For Sphere – officially, there's no "the" – those tools include three football fields of bright 16K LED screens that curve around its domed interior, with another 10 on the outside that light up Vegas day and night with rotating animations. (I saw blue gingham, scarlet sequins and thatches of burlap and straw.) Sphere cost an estimated $2.3 billion to build and must have an electricity bill scarier than the Wicked Witch. You can make out Dorothy's slippers from an airplane.

With no heel clicks needed, I was whisked to "The Wizard of Oz's" Sphere premiere in a red sedan by a Lyft driver named – no fooling – Ruby, who said she was grateful that the Backstreet Boys' recent stint at the arena "made Vegas busy for a minute." There's a lot of financial pressure on "Oz's" girl from Kansas. Adapting the film to Sphere's stunning dimensions took about $100 million. Although the arena seats 17,600 when full, "Oz" showings only offer a slice of the middle section, roughly a third of its capacity. A trimmed 70-minute edit of the movie is playing two to three times a day, nearly every day, through the end of March 2026, with a ticket price that currently starts at $114.

Eighty-six years ago, when a kiddie fare cost 15 cents, my then-6-year-old grandmother watched the theater blink from sepia to vivid color splendor. That innovation gets credited to Hollywood, but the idea of contrasting lush and luminous Oz against soul-drainingly monochrome Kansas is actually right there on Page 1 of L. Frank Baum's book, published in May 1900, a self-proclaimed effort to write a "modernized" fairy tale that swaps Old World elves for American scarecrows. "When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side," Baum wrote, adding that her house and her weary aunt and uncle and everything else were gray too, "to the edge of the sky in all directions."

That's exactly what Sphere was designed to do: stretch to the edge in all dimensions. It exists neither to save film nor supplant it, but to augment a rectangular screen with new digital and (controversially) generative-AI-supplied imagery, timed props and seats that vibrate whenever the Wicked Witch cackles.

Despite my queasiness about cutting "Oz" by half an hour, the experiment is a romp. I was immersed in – or, more accurately, surrounded by – scenes from one of my favorite movies, a pivotal blockbuster whose artistic influence extends from David Lynch to Elton John to Salman Rushdie. Even more giggle-inducing, I was pelted with scented foam apples and dive-bombed by half a dozen drone-piloted flying monkeys.

"The Wizard of Oz" has always braved new technology. An early adopter of Technicolor, it boasted a lighting budget nearly double that of its rival, "Gone With the Wind," yet the latter gobbled nearly every Academy Award and poached "Oz's" director, Victor Fleming, who swapped projects halfway through and won an Oscar for his vision of Sherman's March instead of the Yellow Brick Road. In the 1950s, when the rest of Hollywood was terrified of television, "Oz" agreed to be the first theatrical movie to screen in full on a prime-time network. TV transformed the prestige money-loser into a hit. Sphere has turned "Oz" into a flash point in the industry's fundamental fight over the use of AI. Artists and audiences alike fear a future in which, behind the curtain, there might not be a man at all.

I like my art made by human beings. But I'm no nostalgist. "Oz" was a book, a musical, a silent short and a cartoon before MGM made the variant we adore. It should be a playground for invention.

Entering Sphere, the escalators are tinted sepia and the soundscape hums with birdsong and lowing cattle. The implication is that we've not yet been whirled over the rainbow. Preshow, the view from one's seat is of being in a massive old opera house with dusky green drapes flanked by rows of orchestra seats. None of the proscenium is actually there, nor are the musicians heard running scales and rehearsing "Follow the Yellow Brick Road."

The simulation of human handicraft – of stagehands and horn players hiding in the wings – is unnerving. But it gets you thinking about the actual, contemporary people who are behind that curtain. Visual artists who labored on the Sphere project have justly grumbled that their sweat has gotten publicly dismissed as AI. An actual symphony orchestra rerecorded "Oz's" mono score on the very same MGM stage used in 1939, allegedly with some of the same instruments. It sounds fantastic, and it's so loyal to every jaunty warble that audiences might not notice.

A few scenes have been lopped off entirely. The Cowardly Lion no longer trills about becoming king of the forest. The majority of the shots have been micro-trimmed to be snappier, a pace that wouldn't suit stoners' penchant for synchronizing the movie to Pink Floyd's dreamy, woozy "The Dark Side of the Moon." Occasionally, the camera's placement appears to have been adjusted to allow the visuals to expand to fill the space. Inside Dorothy's Kansan house, a once-shadowed frying pan on the wall now dangles front and center, as does a digitally added "Home Sweet Home" needlepoint nailed to the threshold. (The plotting has become so brisk that we might otherwise miss the message that there's no place like it.)

The tweaks can be subtle and lovely. Dorothy belts "Over the Rainbow" underneath newly actualized bluebirds and an impressively ominous sky. When the tornado happens, the tech changes hit us like a cyclone. We're pulled through the window and into the eye of the storm, where a cow spirals around like it wants to outdo the scene-stealing bovine from "Twister." A great, giddy blast of air from the 750-horsepower fans blew my bangs straight off my forehead. I kept one eye on the screen while trying to catch a flurry of tissue-paper leaves. The wow factor is so staggering that you might not spot that Sphere's founder and chief executive, James Dolan, and Warner Bros. president and CEO David Zaslav have superimposed their faces on the two sailors twirling past in a rowboat – an apropos in-joke for people concerned the moguls have been swept away by their own bluster.

"Anyone can blow wind into your face," Dolan said to the premiere audience before the film began. "Not everyone can make you feel like you're in a tornado." Wearing the Wizard's green top hat and suit and with his microphone dropping out inauspiciously, Dolan never introduced himself, but he did compliment the other creators of the event, who also wore costumes. (I overheard that some of them thought Dolan was kidding about dressing in character until they found themselves spending four hours getting groomed to look lionesque.)

Just a week earlier, in trial runs, perfumes were piped into the air so people could get a whiff of the Emerald City. (Gauging by the souvenir candles in Sphere's gift shop, it is chocolate mint.) They've currently been scaled back out of concerns that it all might get too overwhelming. Having figured out how to do sight, sound, feel and smell, Dolan conceded that only one sense remains: "We still haven't figured out taste."

Taste is definitely still a concern. Oddly, Sphere's "Oz" loses a dram of its spellcraft once audiences touch down in Munchkinland. Seeing the newly added tops of Oz's trees makes the fantastical place look smaller.

You feel for the design teams. They've been challenged to magnify a 4-foot matte painting of the arched hallway into the Wizard's throne room – initially done in pastels on black cardboard – into a 240-foot-tall tableau. One of the 1939 film's production designers, Jack Martin Smith, said that his instructions were to make Oz "ethereal" and "subdued." Descriptions of the cornfield's hand-painted muslin background make it sound like a proto-Rothko. Now, you can see every kernel. The razor-sharp mountains on the horizon don't inspire your imagination – they make you think of Machu Picchu.

More troublesome are the Munchkins and the citizens of Emerald City. Tidied into high definition, they often appear restless. As Dorothy pleads for the Wizard not to fly away without her, we're distracted by hundreds of waving extras who visibly don't give a hoot what happens to the girl. Worse, they occasionally seem to glitch. If that's the best AI can do in 2025, then Sphere isn't a resounding endorsement.

By contrast, Judy Garland's performance, delivered at just age 16, feels monumental. Her big brown eyes dominate the screen. When the heartbroken girl sobs that the Wicked Witch has chased away her beloved Toto, I found myself annoyed by a flying monkey on the left side of the frame who simply looked bored.

The field of poppies is dazzling; the additional deer, ants and rodents skittering across the golden sidewalk are simply strange. Overall, you're so caught up observing the experience itself that the emotions of the story don't register as anything more than theme-ride hydraulics. Still, it's nice to have a sweeping view of the first film's prosthetic makeup: the Cowardly Lion's upturned nostrils, the Scarecrow's baggy jowls, the real horses painted purple and red with Jell-O. (Due to pace tightening, we only see two ponies, not all six).

I recoiled when the Wizard's disembodied head loomed above. Who decided to make him look like a cheesy martian? Flipping through sketches from 1939 afterward, I realized that he always looked that bad. His gaunt cheekbones just weren't as obvious before. Nevertheless, be sure to look to the right when Toto reveals Oz's control booth. In a clever touch, Sphere lets us continue to see the monstrous green face, now neutered and ridiculous, mouth along as the panicked geek apologizes for being a humbug.

Can Sphere win big on its risky gamble that there's no place like dome? It's not the first Las Vegas attraction to bet on our love for the MGM extravaganza. "The Wizard of Oz" has been tangled up with Las Vegas' fortunes for more than half a century, ever since real estate investor Kirk Kerkorian purchased MGM Studios in 1969 and, one year later, auctioned Dorothy's slippers to help fund the construction of the first MGM Grand Hotel and Casino. The second MGM Grand, the one that opened in 1993, was branded for "The Wizard of Oz" – that's why it's green like Emerald City – and during the first year, visitors could walk through an animatronic forest of lions, tigers and gamblers.

The Strip was once a magical place where innocents like Dorothy flocked to get into trouble, often in encounters with sleight-of-hand hucksters like Professor Marvel. Hopes are high that tourists will come back to be transported to Oz, even at a ticket price that costs a chunk of the family farm. The hurdle is that although audiences have become begrudgingly accustomed to spending more than $100 to see their favorite bands, they're still seeing an actual band and not a shortened version of a movie that's popular in part because everyone grew up watching it on TV for free.

But on opening night at least, the crowd was treating the cinema like a concert. Many folks were in some sort of costume, including me. (I couldn't resist wearing a pair of red shoes.) When I complimented a man's blue gingham suit, he handed me a handmade beaded, Taylor Swift-style bracelet that read: Toto Too.

If fans like him turn this techno-incarnation of "Oz" into a hit, Sphere has said it would consider following it up with a similar presentation of "Gone With the Wind." Imagine the smell of the burning of Atlanta. Much better than the air of burning money.

Amy Nicholson is the film critic of the Los Angeles Times.

AUTOMOTIVE

The 2026 Ram 1500 eTorque V-8 boasts 395 horsepower. Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

AUTO REVIEW

The Ram V-8 is back

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

Corporate branding fails are legend. Coca Cola's New Coke debacle. Bud Light's Dylan Mulvaney detour. Cracker Barrel's generic logo remake.

Ram and Dodge ditching V-8s.

The Stellantis brands' epic, head-scratching decision has been the poster child of a bizarre few years in which automakers, reeling from billions in Nanny State fines, scrambled product offerings regardless of customer taste. After the implosion of their V8-focused muscle brands, Stellantis is working to right the ship.

Just as Cracker Barrel restored its traditional logo, Ram has stamped every V-8 model's fender with the "Symbol of Protest" badge featuring a ram's head on an aggressive V-8 Hemi engine. If the six-cylinder lineup felt like surrender to The Man, the protest symbol is a rebel's yell against the Establishment. Take that, nannies!

RAWWWWR! I buried the throttle of the 2026 Ram 1500 V-8 out of Stellantis's Chelsea Proving Grounds on to Chelsea-Manchester Road, the rear tires squealing with delight as I sailed through the pickup's natural habitat: farms, small businesses, rural homes.

The majority of Ram 1500 truck sales are V8-powered, and, according to Sales Chief Brant Coombs, 40 percent of those buyers won't consider anything else. Detroit automakers have been under assault from their own government for making the engines Americans love, with Stellantis alone suffering $773 million in fines since 2016. Ram had been on a roll until those fines hit, surpassing Chevrolet as the #2 best-selling truckmaker in early 2019.

Battered from federal haymakers, Ram's new European owners deep-sixed the eight for the '25 model year, and sales sunk as buyers delayed new purchases of the brand's six-cylinder-only lineup. You could've seen it coming a mile away.

Heads rolled at Stellantis, and, when the smoke cleared, company legend Tim Kuniskis – mastermind of Dodge-Ram's strategy a decade ago – had been installed as chief of North American product. That dovetailed with new management in Washington, D.C. that was favorable to consumer choice. In December 2024 – note the post-election timing – Kuniskis & Co. convened a corporate pep rally to bring back the V-8.

"We heard loud and clear from consumers: there is no replacement for the iconic Hemi V-8. At the end of each month, we count sales to customers, not to statisticians or ideologues," roared Kuniskis. "We raise our flag and let the Hemi ring free again!"

To paraphrase John Belushi and Dan Ackroyd, the Bruise Brothers are getting the band back together.

"It was reminiscent of a few years ago when we were kicking butts and naming names," smiled engineer Marty Jagoda, vice president of special projects. "We put together F-15, a top secret team to get the people and the parts to bring the Hemi back. Hemi is not just an engine, it is the engine."

The first reunion concert was Aug. 26 at Chelsea as Ram invited auto media to hear – and test – the resuscitated 5.7-liter hemi V-8. Like a Heavy Metal 'lectric guitar, the V-8 was everywhere on the Chelsea stage.

RAWWWWR! went a Ram V-8 down a Chelsea straightaway.

RAWWWWR! Went V-8s off-road.

RAWWWWR! Went V-8s around an autocross course. Yes, an autocross course – so eager was the Ram team to show off its signature sound. For this racer, few things are more fun than auto-crossing a pickup.

But the real test was on-road, and the eight felt right at home inside one of the market's most refined trucks. Stellantis is rightly proud of its twin-turbo, inline six-cylinder Hurricane engine that sits under the domed hood of the rampaging RHO (pronounced Rhino) performance truck that I destroyed Holly Oaks with last year. Can the return of the V8-powered TRX (pronounced T-Rex) be far behind?

With model names like Warlock, Rebel, Lone Star and Big Horn, the raucous V-8 is signature Ram. Assured that the federal government won't bury Stellantis in fines for making eight-holers, Ram has dialed up the assembly line to offer the Hemi in most trims.

Nanny shaming makes everyone glum, and the Ram's team energy at Chelsea was palpable now that they no longer have a finger wagging in their face.

"We brought back this engine because our customers demanded it," said Ram 1500 Product Chief Amy Augustine. "They were asking: Where is the V-8? After taking it out of the lineup we could really feel the customers getting upset and not understanding why we took it out."

To make sure everyone hears it, the loud performance exhaust comes standard when you order the V-8 along with a massive 33-gallon fuel tank and best-in-the-industry 10-year/100,000-mile powertrain warranty. If your toffee-nosed neighbors sniff, tell 'em about eTorque, the 48-volt, belt-drive generator that replaces the alternator for smoother, fuel-efficient startups and an increase of 130 pound-feet of torque to help tow up to 11,320 pounds.

The V-8 package is a $2,895 addition over the standard V-6 eTorque on Tradesman, Express, Warlock and Big Horn/Lone Star trims ($1,200 over the inline six-cylinder on Laramie and Rebel models).

RAWWWWR! My $63,380 Big Horn tester is in the sweet spot of the Ram lineup. It's easy on the eyes, and easy on the behind as well with its coil-spring rear suspension. Bed flutter that you get with most leaf-spring pickups? Not that I noticed.

With tall-sidewall rubber mounted on 20-inch wheels, I rode Big Horn as comfortably on dirt trails as on blacktop.

The interior is as classy as it is massive. Leather steering wheel, eight-way power seats, superb steering wheel ergonomics with everything at your fingertips: cruise control, drive modes, volume/station control. A 12-inch infotainment screen anchors the console run by the award-winning Uconnect 5 software. No wonder trucks have replaced large sedans as the new luxury vehicles.

The rear seats of the Ram have more space than many living rooms, and the 5'7" bed options a must-have tonneau cover so you can throw cargo back there without fear of it getting soggy in a summer thunderstorm.

For $1,000, my tester gained bed utility goodies like a box light, tie-downs, sprayed bedliner and deployable bed step. I don't know why every truck maker doesn't adopt GM's solution of corner bumper steps, but, in the fight-to-the-death Detroit Three truck grudge match, every brand has signature features.

For Ram, that includes Hemi. The band is back together. You'll know it by the Symbol of Protest. Long live the V-8.

Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News. Find him at hpayne@detroitnews.com or Twitter @HenryEPayne.

2026 Ram 1500 V-8

Vehicle type: Rear- and four-wheel drive, four-door, five-passenger pickup

Price: $46,115, including $2,095 destination charge (est. $63,380 Big Horn Crew Cab as tested)

Powerplant: 5.7-liter Hemi V-8

Power: 395 horsepower, 410 pound-feet of torque

Transmission: Eight-speed automatic

Performance: 0-60 mph (NA); maximum towing, 11,320 pounds; payload, 1,650 pounds

Weight: 5,712 pounds (as tested)

Fuel economy: EPA est. 17 mpg city/23 mpg highway/19 mpg combined

Report card

Highs: V-8 soundtrack is back; premium ride

Lows: Nightmare to park in an urban garage; no TRX yet

Overall: 4 stars

AUTO REVIEW

The 2025 Mercedes-AMG SL 63 is not merely a car; it's a star

By LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service (TNS)

In the world of high-octane, testosterone-fueled racing, the question arises: Can a race car have a back seat? Is there room for comfort and passengers in a finely tuned instrument of speed?

The thought came to mind while piloting the latest gestation of the Mercedes-Benz SL. Although the first-generation SL changed minimally from its racing days, since then, the SL has capitulated to its place in the market, becoming a luxury grand tourer, albeit with two seats.

Now it has four, arranged in a 2+2 configuration that results in a second row best suited for amputees, your mother-in-law or your ex. If you do stuff some unfortunate souls back there, they won't be comfortable, but they might admire their surroundings.

And for the driver and front seat passenger, those interior surroundings are impressive. Sitting low, hemmed in by the SL's high beltline, you sense yourself not so much in a car as in a leather-and-carbon-fiber spa for adults who still require a toy. Its seats heat, cool and massage you, while the Airscarf gently blows warm air on the nape of your neck during cooler drives with the top down.

This is Stuttgart's notion of a sports car, except that no one in Stuttgart really believes in the suffering that a true sports car inflicts. They learned that lesson in 1954. That SL, the legendary Gullwing, had thick sills to climb over and a cockpit so tight that you had to unpin the steering wheel and tilt it forward to gain admission. So much heat came through the floorboards that it would melt your soles. Even worse, the windows didn't roll down, and there was no air-conditioning.

The instrument panel is a work of theater, accessorized with a 12.3-inch digital instrument cluster and anchored by an 11.9-inch infotainment touchscreen that's the size of a Biergarten menu. Its phosphorescence glows indulgently, stuffed with menus and sub-menus that await the touch of your finger or the sound of your voice. You'll never figure out everything it can do, but it's nice to know it's there if you need it, even if you don't know that it's there. One item that's appreciated is the superb 1,000-watt, 11-speaker Burmester surround sound system, one that plays your music loud enough to make the neighbors question your life choices – and that's before you drop the top or crank the engine.

Speaking of engines, the Mercedes-AMG SL 63 comes with a magnificent AMG-built 4.0-liter twin-turbocharged V-8 delivering 577 horses at full gallop, and riding through a nine-speed transmission. But this SL is the SL 63 S E Performance, which adds a rear-mounted electric motor transforming it into a plug-in hybrid.

Mercedes-Benz AG / TNS

The Mercedes-AMG SL 63.

It also significantly increases the power on tap, which is rated at 805 horsepower and an astounding 1,047 pound-feet of torque. Fuel economy is better than you'd expect, with a combined EPA rating of 18 mpg, and all-electric range of one mile. This hybrid is built for speed.

Press the throttle and the car charges forward, its V-8 erupting like velvet-wrapped thunder, aided and abetted by four-wheel steering and all-wheel drive. Acceleration? How about teleportation? Your cheeks sag and your rib cage compresses during the 2.8 seconds it takes to reach 60 mph. It renders other vehicles as supporting actors in your personal motion picture. The SL has always been a boulevardier, carrying the upper 1 percent to the opera in silk-lined comfort. This one behaves as though someone whispered "Nürburgring" into its ECU. Better yet, any problem in the SL has been engineered out of existence. Is the ride too harsh? Add adaptive dampers. Is it too quiet? A flick of the exhaust valves and suddenly you're leading a Wagner opera from the driver's seat. The suspension? Firm, polite and just mean enough to show you who's boss. Potholes shiver as the SL 63 S E Performance appears.

Of course, you don't drive an SL 63; it announces itself, like a billionaire showing up to brunch in a tuxedo because, well, why not? It arrives, fronted by a massive grille mainlining air to cool its massive petrol-fueled powerplant. Climb inside, slouch low, Ray-Bans on, wrist draped over the wheel with the roof down, the sun catching its chrome, and imagine you're being photographed by paparazzi on the way to the St. Moritz. That's the way it makes you feel. And it's the reason you didn't buy a Porsche or a Ferrari.

Yes, its price starts at $187,150, while the S E Performance variant starts at $207,150. In most people's minds, that buys a small condo. But your condo won't turn heads, scare red lights or make your accountant nervous. The 2025 Mercedes-AMG SL 63 S E Performance is not a sensible sedan or a utilitarian SUV. It's a performance, a personality, a ticket to applause every time you leave the driveway.

Larry Printz is an automotive journalist based in South Florida. Readers may send him email at TheDrivingPrintz@gmail.com.

2025 Mercedes-AMG SL 63 S E Performance

Base price: $207,150

Engine: 00

Horsepower/Torque: 805/1,047 pound-feet

EPA rating (combined city/highway): 16 mpg

Fuel required: Premium

Length/Width/Height: 183/74/51 inches

Ground clearance: 4.4 inches

Payload: 717 pounds

Cargo capacity: 8.5-13.5 cubic feet

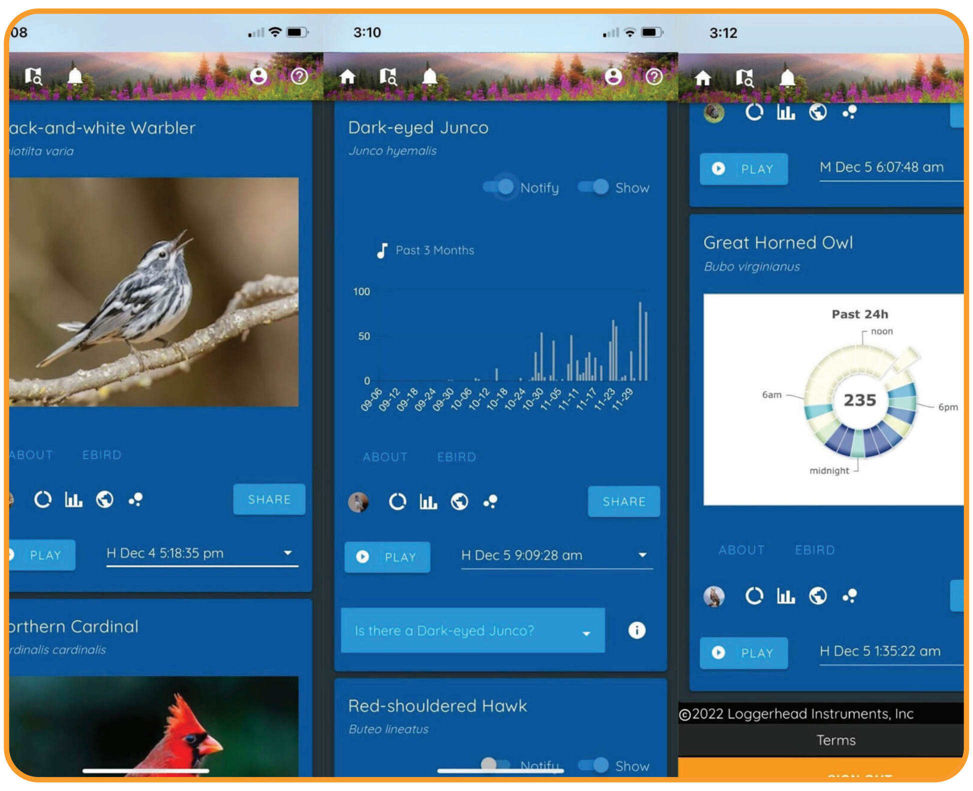
Towing capacity: Not rated

TECHNOLOGY

GADGETS

This device is for the birds

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)



With the Haikubox, there's no more guessing what species of bird that might be hanging right outside your door. Instead, the device, which is easy to use, records the birds' sounds, chirps and songs and sends the information to its database for identification.

The Haikubox has access to more than 282 million bird songs and sounds from more than 6,000 species, enabling identification. The Haikubox app accesses the database, which provides bird identification. Results will allow you to listen to the recordings, view images of the identified species, and examine charts on when and how often the species visit. Alert notifications can be set up for smartphones and smartwatches.

Since I'm not a birdwatcher, I consulted some user reviews on high-tech birdwatching hardware. Several thought it added a whole new aspect to bird watching, where often you might hear a bird but not see it. Now it can be identified by its sound. Others pointed out you don't even have to be home to know what's flying by your back door.

Set up takes just a few minutes: download the app, connect the Haikubox to your home Wi-Fi, and place the actual Haikubox (2.5-by-6-by-1.5 inches) where the Wi-Fi will reach and where there is a standard 110-volt outdoor power outlet. The hardware is weather-resistant and able to withstand rain showers, but it is not waterproof and should not be fully submerged.

A one-year membership is included; additional years are $59. A free tier is available with limited features. One feature available on the paid membership allows you to listen to bird recordings made anytime in the last 30 days. The 30-day feature isn't available on the free membership.

https://haikubox.com/collections/haikubox, $269

The Haikubox has access to over 282 million bird songs and sounds from more than 6,000 species, enabling identification. Haikubox / TNS

Beyerdynamic's wired DT 770 PRO X over-the-ear headphones are not new to everyone, as they were released in 2024 as a limited-edition model to commemorate the company's 100th anniversary. Fast forward to 2025, and Beyerdynamic has made the stylish headphones a permanent part of their lineup.

The German audio equipment manufacturer has a long-standing reputation for setting the standard in professional recording and monitoring headphones, featuring balanced sound, durable construction and unmatched wearing comfort. All this makes it a trusted tool for some of the world's best-known music producers and artists.

The DT 770 PRO X headphones feature Stellar.45 drivers in each earcup, surrounded by silver-grey ultra-soft velour ear pads. I was wearing them for just a few seconds when the thought came to mind that these were one of the most comfortable headphones I had ever worn. The adjustable headband and ear pads combine to create an ergonomic design.

While the headphones are designed for musicians and studio use, there is no stopping anyone from using them for day-to-day music listening, which is what I did. The clarity is unmatched, with everything broadcast in crystal-clear sound. With a $199.99 price tag, the sound is better than many others with prices north of that.

Beyerdynamic touts the headphones' 48-ohm impedance to provide studio-quality audio even on devices with low output power. A handy feature allows them to connect to the music source with an included detachable cable. Included is a 9.8-foot cable with a locking mini-XLR connector for maximum stability, which secures it to the headphones and connects to the music via either a 3.5 mm aux or a 6.3 mm, quarter-inch adapter.

A drawstring carry bag is included.

https://north-america.beyerdynamic.com/p/dt-770-pro-x

Sometimes, charging one powerful gadget is all you need, and at other times, such as overnight at a hotel, you want all your gadgets charged and ready for the next day's venture. The Cuktech 15 140W GaN AC outlet wall charger is the ideal choice for both ends of this spectrum and everything in between.

LEFT: Beyerdynamic DT 770 PRO X over-the-ear headphones. Beyerdynamic / TNS

RIGHT: Cuktech 15 140W multi-port charger. Cuktech / TNS

The multi-port charger is Cuketch's most advanced charger, featuring short-circuit protection for the charging devices, device charging of up to 140 watts of power, overheating protection and multiple fast-charging protocols. Built-in ports include three USB-C and one USB-A, simultaneously supporting power delivery to various devices.

The travel-friendly charger (3.11-by-2.56-by-1.26 inches/11.8 ounces) has a profile 20 percent smaller than Apple's 140-watt charger. It features fold-out AC prongs and will charge most USB charging devices, including laptops (such as Apple MacBook Pro 16-inch M3 Pro), smartphones, earbuds, smartwatches, and iPads. With its GaN technology, charging is done efficiently and with thermal management.

The Cuktech 15 is compatible with most manufacturers, including Apple, Dell, Samsung and the Google Pixel. A 4.9-foot, 240W USB-C cable is included. The list price is $99.99, but it is currently $49.99 at Amazon.

https://cuktech.com

Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @greggellman.

Let's check the security on your security cameras

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

This week I was in a discussion with a person who heard a stranger's voice coming through their Wyze security camera. The person said they were not sharing the camera's feed with anyone. They unplugged the camera, and they wanted to know what to do.

It is helpful to understand the different ways people would be able to access the cameras.

The entire point of these types of cameras is to be able to monitor the camera feed remotely. Ideally, the feed is secured so that only you or people you authorize can see the video.

When you set up a camera system, you'll be creating an account with a login name and password. The cameras work with an app that you load onto your phone or tablet. Some can also be viewed through a web browser.

To see your cameras, you'll log into the app or web page with the account's credentials.

Of course, this means anyone with your credentials can see the video, so it is important to keep the credentials secure. Try not to use a password that you use in other places.

Also, take advantage of two-factor authentication when it is offered.

Two-factor authentication (or 2FA) puts an extra layer of security on the account.

To log in, a person would need the login name, account password and then a second authentication method, which is usually a security code that would be emailed or sent to your phone via text message.

Email is not the most secure way to receive a 2FA code, as it is certainly possible for someone else to access your email. Getting a text to your phone is more secure, as the person logging in would need to be in possession of your unlocked phone.

Finally, some security cameras, like Wyze, allow the user to share individual camera feeds with other people. This sharing is set up in the app.

I suppose it would be possible for someone who has access to your phone to set themselves up to share your video feeds and you not know it unless you know where to look in the app settings.

So, it is important that you understand the security settings available to you when you set up security cameras. Know how to enable two-factor authentication and at least familiarize yourself with the sharing section of the app to be able to see if any unauthorized sharing is set up.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossman techadviser@gmail.com.

Wyze / TNS

Wyze Cam v4.

TECH REVIEW

A good laptop doesn't have to break the bank

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

A big part of being a gadget reviewer is figuring out the target market for the things I get to review.

I realized early on people don't all have the same needs, especially when it comes to computers.

What I need to do on my computer as an IT guy and writer/reviewer is different from the computing needs of most people. Think about the differing needs of video editors vs. accountants.

It is easy to review a $2,000 laptop that has all the bells and whistles and say it's great and recommend it for everyone, but in the real world, not many people I know want to spend that much on a laptop.

It's kind of like a car reviewer testing out a new Mercedes and then writing they think it's the perfect car for everyone.

I love to find great products that don't cost an arm and a leg, which is why I was happy to get a chance to review the new Acer Aspire Go 15 laptop that has a retail price of just $299.

You can find it at acer.com or Amazon. Don't be surprised if Amazon has it a bit cheaper.

Specs

The Aspire Go 15 (AG15-32P-39R2), has a 15.6-inch IPS LCD screen with a resolution of 1,920 x 1,080.

It is powered by an Intel Core 3 processor with 8 gigabytes of DDR5 RAM and a 128-gigabyte solid state UFS drive. UFS is the kind of low-power storage used in mobile devices. It is slower (and cheaper) than top-tier SSDs, but it gets the job done and allows for longer battery life.

It runs Windows 11 with Microsoft Copilot. It ships in S mode, which limits you to use only apps from the Microsoft app store. You can lift that restriction without much hassle to install software from other places.

It has Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5.1.

On the sides, it has two USB-C ports (for data transfer and charging the battery) and two USB-A ports. It also has an HDMI output and a headphone jack.

Acer says the battery should last 12.5 hours in normal use. I didn't have a problem with the battery lasting all day.

How is it to use?

This is what I'd call the minimum acceptable configuration for RAM and hard drive.

It won't take long to fill up the 128GB of storage, because after the Windows 11 installation, when you first boot the laptop and check the available space on the drive, you'll see there's just over 73GB left for your files.

That's pretty stingy. Especially if you want to store any decent-sized photo library. I feel the small storage size was chosen to keep the laptop under the $300 price point. Again, just realize the laptops limitations before you buy.

If I used this one full time, I'd opt to use cloud storage for things like my photos.

So, who is the target market for a $299 laptop? More people than you'd think.

The screen is big, clear and decently bright. The keyboard is comfortable and there is a 10-key numeric keyboard on the right. The trackpad is not too small and it doesn't lag.

If my mom was in the market for a laptop, I'd would not hesitate to steer her towards this one.

My mom left behind computers years ago in favor of an iPad, but some people really like the form factor and full-size keyboard of a laptop.

The Aspire Go 15 is just right if you want to surf the internet, including web browsing and email. It'll also do a fine job with Microsoft Office apps, including Teams, which came preinstalled.

Consuming media, such as listening to Spotify or watching Netflix or YouTube is also no problem for this laptop. I wish the speakers were better, but again they're trying to keep the costs down.

Acer / TNS

The Acer Aspire Go 15.

I like the USB port layout. Two USB-C on the left edge and one USB-A on each side.

I wish the Aspire Go 15 had an ethernet jack, but most home users use Wi-Fi and never even think about a wired network connection like I rely on at my office.

But that's the thing. This is not an office computer. Nor is this a computer for gaming.

But if you want a computer for your mom or a college or high school student, it's good to know Acer is making affordable computers that should last for more than a few years.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossman techadviser@gmail.com.

HOME & GARDEN

Green and blue create a sense of calm in this living space.
Handout photos / TNS

DESIGN RECIPES

The beauty of blue and green

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

When it comes to cool colors such as blue and green, there are various reasons why they work well together.

They are both soothing colors in which their different tints, tones and shades can take on different nuisances. Dark shades of green can work well with deeper shades of blue for a smoky, luxurious feel. Lighter colors such as pale shades of blue and green work well together for a more nautical or aquatic tone.

A key designer "go to" color is often green. The reason is there are so many ways to infuse green into an interior, from nature elements such as greenery to decorative items such as artwork, accents and accessories. Blue is a "staple" color in which there is a tradition and formal element. Blue is also often considered to be a universal color that can be paired well with other colors, especially green.

Paint color selection

Paint colors can be tricky, but an often-accepted color rule is to pair colors of a similar tint, tone and shade. In other words, pair colors that are more on or near a similar row on a paint strip, which typically signals that a color has the same or similar amount of black or white in the creation of its paint mixture.

Blue and green play especially well together because of their similar color undertones. When heavy yellow undertones are added to green the result is warmth and coziness, which also happens with blue. Conversely, cool shades of blue and green work well together.

Tips for introducing blue and green into your décor

When it comes to incorporating blue and green into one's decor, a design hack is to have a bit of a color imbalance so you don't create an overly "matchy matchy" color palette. Instead of having a 50-50 design intent, opt for a sprinkling of various shades of green and blue throughout, using neutral furniture pieces as the foundation for the color palette.

Looking to add a warm "pop of color"? Tertiary colors are those colors that are also combination colors on the color wheel, such as yellow-orange or red-orange. They are great compliments especially when one is looking to warm up a space.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."

Green and blue are paired together for a cool, yet inviting feel.

A master bedroom incorporates blue and green for a soothing vibe.

How can I prepare my HVAC for winter?

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

Winter might still be a few calendar pages away, but early fall is prime time to give your heating system the TLC it needs.

Once the first cold snap hits, HVAC pros start booking up fast. Acting now means you can schedule a service call before the rush. Think of it as giving your system a warm-up before the real work begins.

Here are five smart moves to get your heater ready for the cold months ahead.

Replace your filter

If you only do one thing for your HVAC system, keep its filter up-to-date in accordance with your manufacturer's guidelines. The filter keeps dust and debris out of your unit's internal components, but over time it clogs and slows down airflow. That means your heater works harder, burning more energy and adding unnecessary wear and tear. A dirty filter is like trying to breathe through a scarf; it'll get the job done, but not efficiently. And just like driving your car without an oil change, sooner or later the buildup can create costly damage. Change your filter regularly, and your system will thank you with better performance and lower bills.

Schedule a professional inspection

Twice-a-year inspections (once for heating season, once for cooling) are the gold standard for HVAC care, and now is the time to get on your pro's schedule. A fall inspection before you start using your heater, typically around $100, gives a pro the chance to tune up moving parts, check electrical connections and make small repairs before they become expensive headaches. This isn't just good practice; many manufacturer warranties require proof of regular maintenance by a licensed professional. If you skip it, you might end up paying out of pocket for preventable breakdowns. If you have a service contract with a HVAC company, there's a good chance inspections are already covered.

Dreamstime / TNS

Regular seasonal inspections are essential to keeping your HVAC in good condition.

Weatherproof your home

Your heater can only do so much if warm air is escaping faster than your system can replace it. Air leaks around windows, doors and pipe penetrations are notorious for letting heat slip away. Add fresh weatherstripping, seal gaps with caulk and consider plastic window film to create a thermal barrier. Don't forget the attic. Drafts can rob you of warmth and money all winter long. Spending a weekend sealing leaks can pay off for years in reduced heating costs. You can do this work yourself, or hire a handyperson to do it for a cost of a few hundred dollars, depending on the size of your house.

Guard against carbon monoxide

Fuel-burning appliances, including furnaces, can produce carbon monoxide, which is an invisible, odorless gas that's potentially deadly if it builds up indoors. A proper inspection will catch any leaks in your system, but you should also have your own carbon monoxide alarms. Look for models certified by Underwriters Laboratories, make sure they're battery-powered or have a battery backup, and test them regularly. Place them near sleeping areas so they'll sound the alarm even at night.

Upgrade your thermostat

If you're still using a basic manual thermostat, you're leaving money on the table. The EPA says a programmable thermostat can trim heating bills by 10 to 30 percent when used correctly. Basic programmable models run $100 to $150 installed, while app-controlled smart thermostats average around $250. Either way, it's a small investment that can pay for itself in one heating season.

With a little attention now, you'll be ready to face winter's chill head-on, and enjoy the peace of mind that comes from a home that's warm, safe and efficient.